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THE  
QUIET MRS. FLEMING

An Open Mystery

BY

RICHARD PRYCE

AUTHOR OF "THE UGLY STORY OF MISS WETHERBY," "JUST  
IMPEDIMENT," ETC.

Methuen & Co.

18, BURY STREET, LONDON, W.C.

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# THE QUIET MRS. FLEMING.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE GIRL IN THE PINK PRINT.

MRS. SMITH said her hair was dyed.

“It’s a yellow that is never natural,” she said. “Look at Emma, she has real golden hair, but it ain’t a bit like that. I had a good look at her and her hair is dyed.”

Mr. Smith hazarded some opinion.

“And she is made up,” said Mrs. Smith. “I always know when a lady is made up. You know I’ve lived in the best places and I’ve seen heaps and heaps of people, and I can always tell. There’s a sort of powdery look on her face like the bloom on a grape when you see it sideways. Look at Emma ;

Emma's got a nice complexion. You don't see no bloom on her face."

Emma was not there to be seen. Mrs. Smith spoke figuratively ; but her husband conjured up before his mind's eye a sufficiently accurate vision of the insipid face and the colourless head that formed Mrs. Smith's ideal of perfect feminine beauty

"And then again her eyes," said Mrs. Smith, "she must put belladonna in them to make the pupils so big. There was one lady I lived with as nearly blinded herself with using it. You see I've lived in the best houses where there was dinner-parties constant, and I've seen and I know. Look at Emma."

Smith was accustomed to obeying his wife, and he looked at Emma as before, and he thought of the watery blue eyes and the pale lashes.

"Well, as you're so set against her—" he began.

"Who ever said I was set against her?"

said Mrs. Smith sharply "It's you that are so trusting and so easily imposed upon. I'm obliged to be particular. What I say is, as she ain't as Nature made her, and that I stick to."

"If you think," ventured Smith cautiously, "if you think we're going to be imposed upon, as we were by that family you took in in the summer, who went away owing three weeks' rent, well, then, we'd better say we find she can't have the rooms."

"That's just like you," said his wife contemptuously; "and a chance of a winter let, and the bill been up over a month and nobody so much as asked to look over the rooms. All I say is that she's not what I call handsome. You was so full of her appearance and such. But anybody can be handsome as likes to use condiments."

It is to be presumed that Mrs. Smith meant cosmetics. Mr. Smith was accustomed to agree with her without question, but he found himself wondering whether the

aids to beauty, to which she alluded with so much scorn, would effect any really appreciable difference in her own homely face. She was a little woman with large features and a flat figure. Involuntarily his eyes strayed from her face to the level expanse of shiny alpaca, and he sighed.

It was at this moment that a certain resemblance struck him. He was contrasting the angularity of his wife with the beautiful developments of the lady they were discussing, when of a sudden he remembered another form which had always appealed to his admiration. He used to see it across the road five years ago, when he was butler in his old master's house in Barn Street, Park Lane, where Mrs. Smith—Susan Long she had been then—was cook. The form was the form of a parlour-maid who lived at the house exactly facing that wherein he discharged his own duties. He used to see her every morning. He even rose a little earlier that he might be in time to watch her as she

pulled up the blinds of such rooms as fell to her share in the work of the limited establishment. He had never seen her more closely than across that fifteen yards or so of road ; but he had good eyes, and they had quickly seen her beauty. She wore the neatest pink print dress imaginable, and usually a knot of pink ribbon in her muslin cap. She had brown hair and pretty brown eyes, and the sun used to glisten in them when she sometimes stood for a few moments at the window. He used to see her laying breakfast and carrying in the silver urn ; and then there would be a sound of ringing, and it pleased him to imagine how she must look standing in the passage at the foot of the stairs and swinging in her pretty hands the bell that announced to the house that it was time for the old lady to come down. A Mrs. Manton, he remembered, was the mistress upon whom she attended with such care. After that, his own master's breakfast was served, and, by



the time this was over, a pink form was to be seen moving deftly about the drawing-room opposite—brushing the floor, dusting china and chairs, shaking antimacassars and—yes—it was true, standing sometimes for several minutes before the looking-glass over the mantelpiece. He used to think of the pretty reflection she must have seen there and wish that he could see it too. He often saw her, as she stood there, put up her hands to her pretty hair and push in a stray lock, or, perhaps, pull one down upon her forehead. His own master did not allow fringes, and probably Mrs. Manton's rule was just as strict. And she would turn and look at herself sideways, and sometimes he thought she would smile at her own reflection.

He knew exactly when the little window of her room at the top of the house would flap, as she went in to dress before lunch. And sometimes he could see her at the looking-glass there, that stood with its back to the light. She used to pay great attention

to the pretty hair. A little later when he was laying his own master's mid-day meal he would see her, in a neat black dress with a white collar and cuffs and a fresh cap, performing a like duty. Then the bell would sound again and the old lady would come in, and when he was standing behind his master's chair, and the old man had everything he could want, Smith would turn round furtively and watch the trim form flitting about Mrs. Manton's dining-room. After lunch he would sometimes stand behind the curtains and watch her as she answered the bell to visitors. Sometimes holding her smart cap she came down the steps to speak to the occupant of a carriage—and he never saw her more nearly than that. Smith had little liberty just then, for his master was old and very constant in his demands upon the time of his manservant. So he could only go out in the morning, when he took the poodle for a trot in the park, or on Sunday evenings. The parlour-maid opposite had, on

the other hand, an indulgent mistress, and was apparently allowed to go out twice in the week. It was always in the evening, and Smith used to watch with a jealous pang the figure of a man of gentleman-like appearance who waited for her near the pillar-box on these occasions. He took to hating the very sight of him, and the well-fitting clothes which he wore. Sometimes this person hailed a hansom and with the maid in question drove off, to the endless discomfiture of poor Smith. In thought he followed that hansom and conjectured its destination—a theatre, a restaurant? It was maddening. Punctually at ten o'clock he would hear the click of the area gate opposite, and rushing up to a window, he would see the trim form disappearing down the steps. On those evenings, when she went out with his hated rival, Smith used to remark the smartness of her dress; she looked, as he expressed it to himself, like a lady. He never made her acquaintance. He watched and watched and admired, and

in his own way was restless and unhappy. Then his old master died, and the house was broken up. He found himself the possessor of a handsome legacy. The old man had often expressed a wish that when he was gone his manservant would marry the cook, and when the will was read and Smith heard of the bequest to himself he felt, all unwilling though he was, that he could not do less than ask Miss Long to share his good fortune. She expressed her pleasure at such an arrangement, and the wedding took place almost at once, and part of the capital was expended on a house at a rising seaside resort, with a view to letting lodgings.

All this had happened five years ago, and the pretty parlour-maid was as much forgotten as Smith would ever forget her. Something in the figure of the lady who had called that day about the rooms had reminded him of her. He wondered whether she was still attending upon Mrs. Manton with neat precision, and he sighed

again. Perhaps the old lady was dead, perhaps—

“What are you thinking of?” said Mrs. Smith sharply.

Her husband started.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said ; “what we were talking of, I suppose—the lady who has taken the rooms.”

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LADY WITH THE YELLOW HAIR.

MRS. FLEMING arrived that evening, and Mrs. Smith, despite her severe criticisms, received her graciously, and hoped that she would find the rooms comfortable. She brought up some tea and toast for her, and placed them on a table before the fire. Then she asked for directions as to her lodger's dinner, and withdrew. Mrs. Fleming's large box blocked the little landing between the sitting-room and her bedroom. It was very heavy, and Mr. Smith and the cabman had carried it up the creaking stairs. The cabman had demanded an extra sixpence for his exertion, and Mrs. Fleming gave it without demur.

Smith said that it was a good sign when a

woman did not argue with her driver. Mrs. Smith said: "Well, she couldn't very well 'iggle about sixpence with a trunk like that. I wonder whatever's in it?"

Mrs. Smith was always full of curiosity about her lodgers, so the remark called for little attention. At seven o'clock her husband went up to lay the table for Mrs. Fleming's modest dinner. She was sitting by the fire reading an evening paper. Her back was towards him, and he contemplated her unseen. Mrs. Smith was possibly right as to the nature—or, in this case and her opinion, absence of nature—of the yellow hair. It was elaborately and classically dressed, and its colour that of a canary. It was full of light, and it shone in the glow of the fire. The lady turned presently. The tints of her complexion were admirably managed, and Smith was inclined to question his wife's assertion that art was responsible for them. The eyes were very luminous and brown, and they reminded him vaguely of those of a

woman in a different station in life. He thought again of the neat, tall girl in the pink print, and he sighed. Mrs. Fleming was looking at him in a contemplative sort of way.

"You are my landlord, are you not?" she said in a well-modulated voice.

"Yes'm."

"I like these rooms," she said, looking round critically, "and I think they are likely to suit me. You have no other lodgers, Mr. Smith?"

"No'm. You see it's winter now, and the season doesn't begin rightly till May or June."

"I am glad of that," said the lady. "I desired rest and quiet—that was my reason for coming to this place. I am not very strong, and I am likely to be confined a great deal to the house. I don't think you will find that I shall give you much trouble."

"No'm," said Smith again. He had paused in his work of laying the table.



“And I shall have few visitors,” said Mrs. Fleming. “My doctor may come down from town to see me, but I know no one here. And, Mr. Smith, I shall want a newspaper—will you order a morning and an evening paper to be sent to me from to-morrow?”

Smith promised with enthusiasm that her directions should be executed. The very word newspaper had a charm for him. He was not allowed to have one daily on his own account. His wife was wont to declare that she “never did see such a one as Smith for idlin’ his time over a bit of news,” and the good woman’s tongue being insistent as a clapper, her husband was fain to content himself with a weekly local sheet, which contained little but advertisements. Mrs. Fleming’s order was, then, a herald of good times.

“You are fond of reading?” she said to him one day, as, coming in to breakfast, she found him poring over her paper.

He put it down quickly.

"I beg pardon, 'm," he said ; "I didn't hear you come in."

"And what was interesting you so much?" she asked, with a smile.

"Well, I was just reading that Markham case that there's so much talk about."

"What is the Markham case?" asked Mrs. Fleming.

"Oh, don't you know, 'm?" said Smith with surprise. "It's that big jewellery robbery in Wiltshire. There were things stolen to the value of several thousand pounds, and I see they've traced it now to a man called Brinsley, who has disappeared. They don't think he's got out of the country yet, because the ports have all been watched, and he's still at large."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Fleming. "It makes one quite glad one has no jewellery. Being poor has some advantages, hasn't it?"

Smith gave a pleased smile. Mrs. Fleming had charming manners. She was, as he expressed it, so affable.

Mrs. Smith unbent in the course of the next few days. She allowed that she might be mistaken about the belladonna. She still maintained that the hair was dyed.

“For it ain’t a natural colour,” she said.  
“Look at Emma.”

Emma happened to be present on this occasion, and she bridled and glanced coyly at Mr. Smith from under her fringe.

“That’s real golden ’air, that is,” said Mrs. Smith.

Emma said, “Oh, aunt !”

“You needn’t ‘oh, aunt,’ me so modest,” said the proud relation. “You favour your mar. My sister Jane had just that coloured ’air when younger.”

Smith thought at this moment that if that shock of colourless curls was nature, of the two he preferred art. He did not say so, however, but read the paper in silence.

He was full of the mystery enveloping the theft of the Markham jewels.

“They’re finding out a lot more about

him," he said, looking up presently. "It's thought now that he's wanted for other things as well as this. The man's died that he shot at when he got away, so if they ever get him they'll try him for murder."

"Fancy!" said Emma. "I wonder where he is. Isn't it dreadful to think we might pass him in the street and not know."

"Tsh! What's that?" cried Mrs. Smith suddenly, holding up her finger, and listening

The beautiful Emma turned pale, and looked affrightedly over her shoulder.

"What's the matter?" she asked in a terrified whisper.

Smith looked up.

"I thought I heard talking," said his valet.

"Talking? nonsense, you're nervous," said Smith. He rose as he spoke, and went to the door. The handle was loose and rattled loudly as he turned it.

Was there a sudden sound upstairs? The house was still. Only Mrs. Fleming was humming in her room.

## CHAPTER III.

### BRINVILLE.

EMMA was of the nervous and hysterical order of girls, and she said she was afraid to walk home.

“Aunt’s gave me such a turn,” she said, “jumping up sudden like that ; and what with uncle reading about murders and one thing or another I daren’t go along the road by myself.”

“Uncle shall walk ’ome with you,” said Mrs. Smith.

“It’d be so awful if I was to pass him and not know,” said Emma again.

“It’d be a deal awfuller if you did,” said her aunt.

Smith put on his coat, and left the house with his wife’s niece. With all her nervous-

ness Emma had a morbid craving for the horrible, and she made her uncle recount all that he had read of the case, dwelling more particularly upon that portion which dealt with the footman who had followed the man out of the house, and had received the discharge of his pistol in the face.

“How awful,” said Emma; “I wonder whether it blew his nose off.”

She had once known a man without a nose, and she started upon reminiscences.

“He had to wear a little black patch on a piece of elastic—like aunt wore when she got the cold in her eye—and he couldn’t speak plain. I wonder whether the poor footman ’ad he have lived would have been ’bliged to do the same. Isn’t it dreadful to think?”

Smith could not say.

“He’s dead any way,” he said, “and if they get the man it’s murder.”

Emma did not know what things were coming to—what with stabbings and poison-

ings and the mortality of infants "put in the club," a respectable girl was afraid to walk about by herself.

"It's perfectly awful I call it, and it ought to be put a stop to," she said. "Do you think they'll hang him?"

"They've got to find him first," said Smith.

"Think they'll do that?" asked Emma.

Her uncle by marriage could not say.

Emma started off again.

"There's a story in my *Young Ladies' Novelist* about an awful murder of an old lady who was cut into little pieces and posted to friends in the country; wouldn't it be dreadful to get a little packet by parcel's post expect it was parcel's post, because it'd come expensive letter weight, and you couldn't leave the ends open—and when you opened it find a piece of some one as you'd known! The heroine had brain fever when she opened hers and found a finger and a bit of an ear, and all the time the murderer was lodging in the same street and with her old

nurse as let lodgings, and nobody knew. Wouldn't it be dreadful if he was to go to you and aunt?—him as shot the footman I mean. There's no knowing."

"Well he couldn't have the drawing-rooms any way," said Smith, "for they're let."

"And to think," said Emma Hollis, "to think that when I'm helping mother mind the shop he might come in for a pound of our best two-and-four, or a tin of preserved beef, or a pot of jam. It's dreadful, I consider."

The pair had reached the grocer's and provision store which was their destination. Emma invited him in, but he declined, and turned to go home.

The night was stormy. The wind blew up from the shore. The salt smell of the seaweed, washed astrand by the tide, was in his nostrils, and he pulled up the collar of his coat about his ears as the gale whistled round him. The moon shed a bright and fitful light. Thin and fragmentary clouds were



being swept hurriedly across the sky. Smoke from chimneys in the town was blown hither and thither and was quickly dissipated. The clock in the tower of one of the many churches with which Brinville-super-mare, in common with every other rising resort, abounded, struck the hour of nine. It was early yet. Smith thought he would take a turn upon the Marine Parade — known familiarly to the inhabitants as the P'ryde — before returning to the domestic hearth. Brinville, you must understand, was rising. It had not yet so far risen as to command a winter season. In July and August it mustered a sufficiently large number of visitors to keep it going for the rest of the year. Smith had at no time any very great faith in the town. It would never be a fashionable watering-place, of that he was certain. The people who came down were hopelessly middle-class. They came year after year and crowded up the lodgings and the hotels; and the Parade, now empty and desolate,

swarmed with over-dressed women and their showy daughters ; men, who stayed for a fortnight with their wives and families, and after that came down on visits from Saturday to Monday ; clerks, shopkeepers, professional men, nurses, children, perambulators, and dogs. Then Brinville put out all its attractions. The town band, which was execrable, played morning and evening in front of the Imperial Hotel, and Christie minstrels twanged their banjos and sang their songs upon the sands. A row of ramshackle old chaises stood in an enclosure in the road, and were to be hired by the hour. Donkeys, forlorn and obstinate, and goat carriages, with troublesome boys in aggressive attendance, were provided for the amusement of the children. There was bathing too, and the guide book, published by a local and enterprising newsagent, described it as unrivalled. The work was redundantly entitled, "Brinville-super-mare, its environs and neighbourhood—with maps, and an exhaustive list of ex-

cursions to all outlying places of interest, together with a table of omnibus routes, cab fares, and tariff of the principal hotels ; Also a short account of its history and foundation, in the year of grace one thousand eight hundred and sixty, by John Brin, Esquire, of London and Belfast. Compiled by William Basset-Hollis."

Mr. Basset-Hollis was uncle to Emma, the type of beauty, and through the medium of Mrs. Hollis—no Basset in this case—of the provision store who, as we know, was sister to Smith's wife, the choice had been made of Brinville as the most desirable of resorts wherein to set up a lodging-house.

From a financial point of view the enterprise had been successful. A great deal of money was spent in Brinville in the summer by the rich and vulgar and also by others who, if the truth were known, economised during the rest of the year. In August the theatrical legend, "House Full," might have been hung in most of the windows. It had

even been on record that upon a Saturday preceding that bank holiday known as "first Monday," the bathing machines had been brought into requisition to supply the demand for sleeping accommodation.

Smith thought that on the whole he preferred the place out of the season. He turned on to the Parade, "sheltered," *vide* guide book, "by a noble avenue of trees." This assertion on the part of Mr. Basset-Hollis was due to a flight of the imagination and verged on inaccuracy. The trees had been planted only a year or two before the compiling of the work, and they remained striplings, meagre, stunted, and insufficiently nourished. Each one was surrounded by a little wooden railing, and was supported by props. So often were two or three at a time laid low in the storms of the winter, that at a recent meeting of the local board of health it had been moved that they should be taken away.

Someone said it was absurd to have planted

them at all. Mr. Basset-Hollis said their removal would necessitate a new edition of the guide book. There was some further and desultory talk which came to nothing.

Mr. Basset-Hollis and the guide book were of paramount importance in Brinville. The work had a large circulation and paid its expenses in sales and advertisements. It was thrust upon the newcomers at all the stationers, and was bought by those who either thirsted for the information it contained or else gave in to importunity.

Smith left the Parade and went down to the terrace. Here the wind had its own way, and he pulled his cap tightly down on to his head. The spray was blown up into his face. The tide was very high. The sands were entirely submerged, and the surf broke on the shingle. After each wave came the roar of the receding stones. Smith stood and watched the frolic of the storm. Out where the sea was dark under a cloud he could

see dimly the white crests of the breakers. Now the cloud had passed, and the moon sailed forth and seemed to gaze passively down upon the troubled waters. Pebbles glistened on the shore. A bit of wreckage was being washed up and carried back, and Smith looked at it, wondering whether after all it would be left upon the beach or borne away by the restless sea. Then he walked on to where the terrace became the road that led round the hill upon which stood the light-house. Here the waves struck the rocks at the base of the cliff with a voice of thunder. The road was wet with spray. A flake of foam tossed up by wave and wind lay shivering on the wall, and trembling as one by one the tiny bubbles burst. The clouds sped across the sky fast and ever faster. Each seemed to hurry after that which had gone before. The wind lulled sometimes, and then in a hurricane renewed its work. Smith turned his back upon it, and leaning, it gave him support. When he began to move it

hurried him forwards, and at a trot he retraced his steps.

Two figures, those of a man and a woman, were sitting on one of the seats on the terrace. As he neared them the moon was obscured by a cloud and all was dark as he passed them.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SOUNDS IN THE NIGHT.

MRS. SMITH was in the kitchen. A large red worsted shawl was on the table, and her husband glanced at it inquiringly.

“What a while you was,” said Mrs. Smith acridly, “anybody’d think as Emma lived the other side of the town instead of only two streets off. I suppose you went in, and Jane is such a one to keep you talking.”

“I didn’t go in,” said Smith, “I went for a walk on the terrace.”

“Did you meet Mrs. Fleming?” asked his wife.

“Has she gone out?”

“Almost at once after you,” said Mrs. Smith. “She rang the bell just after you’d left the house, and I went up, and she was



standing at the winder. And she said she thought of going out for a turn, being as she liked the wind. She'd just like a bit of a blow before she went to bed. And she asked me how long you'd be out, and I told her where you was gone, and what time we liked to shut up the house, and I said at 10.30. So she said she should be in long before that, and she put on her ulster and come downstairs with me, and just as we'd got to the bottom she says 'I wonder whether you could lend me a shawl or anything to put round my throat to save me unpacking.' And I says I should be very pleased, and I went up all them stairs again to the top of the 'ouse, and I don't suppose I was above five minutes, but I 'eard the door slam just as I'd found it, and when I come down she 'adn't waited for it. Very inconsiderate I call it."

"Well, it isn't cold," said Smith, "I dare-say she won't miss it. However, I wonder at her going out at night as she is delicate."

"It's to be hoped she won't want to do it

again," said his wife. "else she'll give the house a bad name."

"Bad name—how can you?" said Smith

The bell was rung at this moment and he went to open the door. Mrs. Fleming came in with a gust of wind.

"What a night it is," she said pleasantly, standing in the hall for a few minutes before she went up to her room, and watching him as he barred the door. "I could not resist going out for a little blow. Though I am afraid it was not very wise of me. I hope you fasten the door very safely for fear of burglars? That's right, and will you tell Mrs. Smith that I found a shawl myself at the top of my box—"

Mrs. Smith appeared in the passage holding the woollen wrap she had fetched.

"Oh, I am so sorry you had the trouble," said Mrs. Fleming; "I was just telling your husband I found my own, and I thought it better not to delay to tell you because it was getting late—"

“Or else I ’ad this one all ready,” said Mrs. Smith a little stiffly, for, as she often said, she hated “going up them stairs,” and to go up on a fool’s errand was very annoying, “and I wasn’t above a few minutes.”

“It was very kind of you,” said Mrs. Fleming, “and if I had known quite where you had gone to look for it, I would have called out to you not to mind about it. I am so sorry you had the trouble.”

“It was no trouble, ’m,” said Mrs. Smith.

“Well good-night,” said Mrs. Fleming. “I must be going to bed. I hope I shall not have caught cold by going out. For I am not very strong and I have to take care of myself. Good-night.”

“Good-night, ’m.”

Mrs. Fleming went upstairs. The light of the hall lamp fell on her yellow hair and showed the pattern of the cloth of her ulster.

“Oh, by the way,” she said turning, “I am always a little nervous at night and I am a light sleeper and—and I always like to know

where people are in the house. I suppose my bell rings downstairs—doesn't it? so it wouldn't be much good if I wanted anything. Where is your room, Mrs. Smith?'

"You needn't be afraid, 'm," said that lady grimly. "We have no burglaries at Brinville. There hasn't been one I don't know when, and then it wasn't in a private house, but at one of the hotels. Any way, 'm, we should hear you if you was to call. We're on the next floor above yours."

"At the front or the back?" asked Mrs. Fleming.

"The back. But we should hear you all right."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Fleming. "I always like to know."

She went to her room.

Mrs. Smith gathered up her sewing and put it into the cupboard. Then she raked out the embers in the grate and turned out one of the two gas jets that lighted the kitchen. This was a proceeding that Smith

always resented. It was his custom to sit up for a quarter of an hour or so after his wife had gone to bed, and he saw no reason for being denied the advantage of the light of the second burner. Mrs. Smith apparently considered it unnecessary and put it out when she herself had no further use for it. Smith said nothing at the time, but re-lit it when she was gone. In the earlier days he had remonstrated, but he had always been told it was wanton extravagance to sit up in a blaze of light. After a time he desisted and had recourse to stratagem. The fire he could never repair. Mrs. Smith raked it out so effectually that the glowing coals, isolated, or choked by the dust of the ash-pan, soon grew grey and cold. He had once so far asserted himself as to light up the fire with sticks, but his crime being discovered he got such a hearing from the despot of the domestic hearth that he never dared to do it again. He used to content himself with putting the few remaining embers together with the tongs

and sitting with his feet on the fender so long as the warmth lasted. He was not permitted to smoke. Mrs. Smith said the smell got into the kitchen utensils, and that she could taste it in the tea.

“ Look at Emma’s father,” she said ; “ he never smokes.”

Smith thought of the little Methodist grocer with his shiny black coat, his made-up tie, and his open waistcoat that showed a broad expanse of white shirt fastened with black studs ; he thought of the pallid face and the thin and oily hair, and said below his breath :

“ If he did it ’d make him sick.”

Mrs. Smith said, “ What’s that you say ? ”

“ Oh, nothing,” replied her husband with a sigh ; and Mrs. Smith allowed that she “ should think not indeed.”

“ If you must smoke,” she said, “ you can do it in the yard. I don’t suppose the fowls will like it but *they* won’t be able to complain, poor dumb things. But I won’t have

it in the room where I set and 'ave me meals, so I tell you, and if ever I find your beastly pipe—recking of tobacco—I shall put it behind the fire ; so there.”

This conversation had taken place a long time ago, and poor Smith had given in, and the pipe was relegated to the bottom of his tin box. He did not care to smoke in the yard, and he had married a wife for better or worse. In his case it was mostly for worse, but he was peaceable, and, if he sighed occasionally for the freedom he had lost, and the youth he was passing in bondage, he made no louder complaint. Mrs. Smith having put out the light of the usual burner, prepared to leave the room. She was a woman of last words and of many directions.

“Don't sit up half the night,” she said. “It wakes me when you come up. And put your chair back in its proper place when you're done with it. And lock the kitchen door. Don't forget. Are you listening to what I say ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said her husband.

“ Well then, heed,” said Mrs. Smith ; “ and don’t let me find the room all untidy when I come down in the morning. You can put the newspaper into the coal-box. They do to light the fire, and I can’t bear to see ’em messing about all over the place. Now, don’t sit up ; do you hear ? ”

She made him answer her again before she left the room. He heard her going upstairs. He stretched himself and buried his face in his hands.

The embers made a soft sound as they grew cold. Sometimes a bit of smouldering coal cracked. The wind was howling round the house and wailing in the chimneys. He could hear the subdued crashing of the waves on the shore. A cricket chirped in the wainscot.

He remembered a cricket that used to sing in the kitchen in Barn Street. One of the servants had hated the sound and had tried to catch and kill the insect. Her efforts



had been without success, and nightly the little singer had sung his song. Those were happier days, thought John Smith, and his head rested heavily on his hand. He had only had his wages then, but what of that? He had been his own master. What were the few hundreds which stood in his name in the funds—and for which he only received two-and-three-quarters per cent—compared with the inestimable possession of his freedom. Would that the money had gone elsewhere! Then Susan Smith would be Susan Long still—or, at the least, he might safely say she would not be Mrs. Smith; and he—well, what of himself? He would be in service still. He would be a butler now in some smart London house, or, perhaps, he would be valet to a gentleman. This he would have liked best of all. There was young Mr. Saltash, his old master's nephew, who had tried to tempt him out of his place.

“You're a very smart fellow,” Mr. Saltash

said to him at the time, "and you're an uncommon good hand at folding clothes. That portmanteau is really well packed. Look here, I'll take you for my servant, and give my man notice if you'll come to me."

Smith smiled.

"Thank you, sir, you're very kind, but I can't leave Sir James, sir. You see I'm used to his ways, and he wouldn't think well of me if I was to leave him. Thank you, sir, all the same."

"Well, if you ever do leave him, let me know," the young man said lightly; and at luncheon before he left, he told his uncle of the conversation.

"Ah, my boy, I can't spare Smith," old Sir James said, and the butler had felt rewarded.

And he had stayed on with the results which we have seen.

To-night did he wish that he had allowed his inclinations to guide him? He wondered where young Mr. Saltash was now. And

then he wondered about the wearer of the pink print. The sequence of thought was natural, for though Sir James and Mrs. Manton had not been acquainted, the old man's nephew, Mr. Saltash, had dined sometimes at the house opposite. What was she doing now, the beautiful girl with the brown hair and eyes? He wondered vaguely, too, why she had been so much in his thoughts the last few days. He had believed her forgotten, and now a chance resemblance brought back a recollection of all those unexpressed hopes that he had dimly entertained when he used to stand at the window to watch her movements.

Once more he sighed heavily. The striking of the kitchen clock reminded him that the hour grew late. He rose inertly and proceeded to obey his wife's directions. He pushed back his wooden chair into its row along the wall. He put the newspaper into the coal-box. He was conscious as he moved of a sensation of cold. The grate

was black. The embers were dead. How the wind was whistling in the chimney. Then he put out the gas. He had not had the energy to-night to re-light the second burner.

He was groping his way out of the room when he thought he heard a noise at the hall door. It was as if some one had tapped it lightly with a cane. Then he thought he heard a window thrown open. He went up the stairs and looked through the glass at the side of the door. The clouds were gone now, and the night was white with moonlight. There was no one to be seen as far as the range commanded by the little window allowed him to see. The door was securely locked and bolted. So he put out the hall lamp and went up to his room. As he passed Mrs. Fleming's door he saw by the light which penetrated above and below the ill-fitting and unseasoned wood that she was still astir.

He did not sleep well that night. The

roar of wind and wave kept him awake. He could hear the fall of the shingle. The house shook in the violence of the gale, and a chimney-pot swung round on the roof with a gritty creaking. Mrs. Smith slept the sleep of the just, and seemed to brag of her achievement by her snoring.

The blind flapped in the draught that came through the crack at the hinge of the window, and the lath that weighted it tapped the wood-work with a recurring sound.

What was that?

The door rattled as if it had been struck by a sudden gust of air. But what was strange in that? Was not the whole night buffeted and hustled by the hurricane? Surely a stronger draught blew across his face, and did not the blind give a wider flap? It was as if some of the storm that raged without had been allowed an ingress to the house. Had the window on the stairs blown in? If so the draught would continue, but it had subsided and was gone. Smith sat up

in bed and listened. The stairs often creaked at night. There was nothing odd or unusual in that. The house had been run up in the ordinary Brinville style by a contractor who cared little if windows rattled and doors warped. Brinville, you must understand, had been erected with more view to haste and showiness than to substantiality.

In most of the rows of red brick houses, called so invitingly *Queen Anne*, stairs might be heard to creak. (It seems a little hard, perhaps, upon the memory of a sovereign who is so very much dead that she should be called upon to give her name to every little gim-crack residence that is run up with half-baked bricks and unseasoned timber). Mr. Smith, therefore, knowing the nature of the house too well did not get up at once to see whether there was any unusual cause for a gust of wind and a creaking of wood. Mrs. Smith stirred uneasily and ceased her snoring. She was on the verge

of waking, and any movement on his part would arouse her. So he lay down again in bed and hoped that all was well. When he rose in the morning everything was as it should be, and he was glad that he had not got up for nothing.

## CHAPTER V.

BY THE DOCTOR'S ORDERS.

MRS. FLEMING was as good as her word, and she gave little trouble. She lived very quietly, and Mrs. Smith so far was impressed in her favour as to wish "there was more like 'er in the world."

"She's very different to them as come down in the summer," she allowed to Emma Hollis. "She don't keep me running up and down to answer her bell, and she pays her bill very regular."

"She's a beautiful dresser," said Emma.

"Oh, I don't set much store by that," said Mrs. Smith. "Any one can dress well as likes to spend money on it. I could meself. But it wouldn't beseem my station. I like something plain and black, such as alpaca



or merino for week days, and a bit of silk for a Sunday. But what's the good of her dressing well when she hardly ever goes out?"

"I wonder why ever that is," said Emma. She tied her cheap boa round her short throat as she spoke, preparatory to going home.

"I don't know. She just sets and reads."

"Novels?" asked Emma, whose idea of literature was bounded by the penny weekly magazines.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. Smith. "I've other things to do than to inquire. Have a drop of beer before you go—keep the cold out."

Emma declined.

"I only like beer to me food," she said; "I don't seem to care for it alone."

"You can please yourself," said Mrs. Smith. "If you're going by the pillar you might post that letter for me."

She pointed to an envelope on the dresser. Miss Hollis was putting on her red silk

gloves. As she pulled them up over her sleeves she glanced at the direction :

“J. Benson, Esq., Care of Pelly's Library, Lane Street, W.C.”

“Wonder what she writes there for,” said Emma. “It's hers, I s'pose?”

She looked up to the ceiling to indicate the occupier of the drawing-rooms.

“Yes, it's hers. Where's it to? I didn't take much notice. Some library, ain't it? I must tell her of your uncle Basset's shop. If she wants books it's a pity to let the custom go out of the family.”

“I don't think you write to Pelly's for books,” said Emma, doubtfully, “and you see it's only ‘Care of Pelly's.’ I think it's one of them places where you can direct letters. You remember my friend, Miss Hawkes—her with the black hair as was young lady assistant at Rawlinses', in High Street. When some one answered her matrimonial advertisement in the *Novel Reader's Companion* she had to address her reply ‘care of Pelly's.’ I shouldn't

like to marry that way meself, and I'm sure the way hers has turned out's a caution to snakes. Is Mrs. Fleming a married lady?"

"Oh, lord, yes, I suppose so," said Mrs. Smith; "whatever put that into your head, Emma?"

"P'raps she's a relic," said Miss Hollis. In domestic fiction a widow was frequently called "the relict," and Emma prided herself upon a certain elegance of expression. Possibly vulgarity is most noticeable when it affects a veneer of refinement. Emma happily did not know this, but then, neither did she know she was vulgar.

"I don't know about that," said Mrs. Smith, determined not to show her ignorance of the meaning of the word. "I don't know about her being a relic. I think myself she must be a widow, though she's not in what I should call mourning."

"Well, perhaps she's advertised for a husband, or answered an advertisement same as Miss Hawkes done. I remember hers

quite well, it said, 'Advertiser is tall, dark, and considered good-looking. Fond of home and children.' They all say that," added Miss Hollis, innocently, "I can't think whatever for!"

She put the letter into her muff.

"Well, good-bye, aunt. I must be off. Give my love to uncle, won't you? See you a' Sunday, I s'pose. P'raps I'll look in one evening. Good-bye."

"Don't forget the post," Mrs. Smith called to her.

Miss Hollis—Emmer Rollis she was known to her friends—nodded and took her departure. Mrs. Smith went back to her work of preparing Mrs. Fleming's luncheon. Two fine chops were frizzling on the grid-iron and filling the kitchen with an appetising savour. Mrs. Smith's face grew red as she bent over the fire to stir a saucepan containing mashed potatoes.

"Widow, wife or relic"—Mrs. Smith clung to the word as well-sounding whatever its

meaning, and with the intention of adding it to her own vocabulary—"widow, wife or relic, for an invalid lady she eats very hearty. They're pretty chops they are—Soames' meat's very good, I will say, for all he's Smith's finding and not mine—and there won't much of them come down."

Mrs. Fleming's appetite had more than once evoked comment downstairs. Mrs. Smith had said on the third day of her sojourn that she ate enough for two.

"There's nine o'clock breakfast," she said, "look at that: a dish of bacon—three rashers I cooked, cut liberal, and a couple of eggs. Then there's lunch at one thirty, look at the 'ole she made in that piece of beef. Then there's tea at five. Well, she don't eat much then, but that's not surprising when you come to think. And after that there's supper at eight."

"She didn't eat much the first night," said Smith, "when I attended her."

"That was because you was in the room,"

said his wife. "She didn't like to ; and I expect that's why she don't let you wait now when you've taken up her meals. I don't seem to fancy me food meself if there's any one a-lookin' on, and I'm sure I shouldn't if I was accustomed to eat as much as her. But I'm not complaining, for, excepting with her eating, she doesn't give no trouble, not to speak of."

Mrs. Fleming's appetite seemed to distress herself. Mr. Smith thought she was concerned as to what might be said of it in the house.

"I am obeying my doctor's orders," she said one day with her pleasant smile, as her landlord was laying the table, "and I mind this part of his treatment far more than his medicines. It seems to me that I have no sooner finished breakfast than I have to begin eating again, and if he knew how much I hate it I think it would soften his heart. But he is very obdurate."

"It's no good having a doctor and then not doing what he tells you," said Smith. He

was always deeply flattered when Mrs. Fleming condescended to talk to him. She had very winning manners, and her smile, reminding him as it did of another smile he used to know, though not more nearly than across fifteen yards of road, was as a gleam of sunshine.

“It would be throwing away good money,” he said; “I don’t think it is any use paying for advice and not following it.”

“No more don’t I,” said the lady. She amended her sentence at once. “I don’t think so either,” she said.

Men of John Smith’s class, all untutored as their own mode of expression may be, are quick to remark a lapse of grammar in those above them. A servant will know at once the difference of breeding between the well-born in the straitened circumstances of a semi-detached villa in an unfashionable suburb, and the wealthy *parvenu* in his mansion in Mayfair or Belgravia. Smith had before now remarked certain little pecu-

liarities in the accent and mode of expression of his fair lodger. Possibly had he not been so prejudiced in her favour he might have criticised her more severely. Possibly her brilliant, albeit, aided beauty blinded him to her imperfections.



## CHAPTER VI.

### BLUEBEARD'S CHAMBER.

MRS. SMITH was full of curiosity as to the contents of the large box.

It was a grey trunk of generous proportions, such as American women love to fill with smart clothes and to take with them when they are travelling. It had *Mrs. Fleming* painted upon it in square black capitals. It was made of wood and very strongly built, with massive handles which left no excuse to the porter who delights to carry luggage by its weakest part. Mrs. Fleming had possibly studied the ways of the average railway servant, and had provided herself with a piece of luggage which could only be carried in the proper way. The fittings were of brass, and

the corners were handsomely protected with plates of the same metal. With all its strength and substantiality there was nevertheless a hole in the side of it. Mrs. Fleming professed great annoyance when Smith pointed it out to her. It must have been done in the train, she said. Smith offered to procure the services of a local carpenter, who would, he was sure, make a neat and inexpensive job of it, but Mrs. Fleming thought there was no hurry about it, and that, as it would be very inconvenient to unpack everything the box contained in order to empty it for the workman, it would be better for the hole to remain as it was, at all events, for the immediate present.

Smith and the cabman had deposited the trunk, as we have seen, upon the landing, and had left Mrs. Fleming's valise and travelling rugs at the foot of her bed. The next morning, however, when the landlord came down the box was gone from where it had been placed, and it was standing instead in

Mrs. Fleming's bedroom, against the wall, at the far side from the door.

"How did you move it, 'm?" he asked in surprise. "It was so heavy, I wonder you were strong enough."

"I took some of the things out and dragged it across the passage," Mrs. Fleming explained.

"Hadn't you some difficulty to get it through the door, 'm?"

"It was rather difficult."

"It must have been, for it takes two rightly to move a box like that."

"I was just able to manage it," said Mrs. Fleming. She was standing with her back to the window during this conversation, and her head was outlined in gold by the light. Her face was in shadow, whence only her eyes were plainly visible. They were very bright.

"I wish I had known you wanted it in your room," Smith said after a pause. "We would have moved it for you with pleasure."

"I am sure of that," said Mrs. Fleming, "but I did not think of it till it was too late. I think you had gone to bed when I began to take out my things, and I found it so cold in the passage that I just bundled out as much as would lighten the box enough to allow me to pull it over the carpet, and there it is."

"I should have been afraid of your straining yourself, 'm."

"I don't think I did," said the lady

"And how very quiet you must have been, for we didn't hear you?"

"I was careful to do it as noiselessly as I could," said Mrs. Fleming.

Smith told his wife that this was another sign of the lodger's consideration.

Mrs. Smith thought the box must contain valuables. She was the more confident that she was right in her surmise when, as the days went on, Mrs. Fleming's bedroom door was kept sedulously locked. As soon as the landlady had made the bed and settled the

room, the door was kept locked till the evening.

Mrs. Smith said she "should have thought the great brass lock would have been protection enough," and that it was "not as if you could pick up the box itself, and put it under your arm, and run out of the house."

She was sure the trunk must contain valuables. Had not Mrs. Fleming said something about her fear of burglars, and had she not inquired into the strength of the bolts and bars of the hall door? The precaution of locking up the bedroom was very unnecessary ; but, as Smith pointed out to her, it did not cast any doubt upon the honesty of himself or her, as the door was always open for Mrs. Smith in the morning.

"And if," he said, "she likes to keep the place shut up, and the key in her pocket, it's hers to do as she likes with."

"Only temporary," said his wife

"As long as she pays the rent," said Smith.

The box was to the landlady what Bluebeard's chamber had been to Fatima.

"I don't think it's gowns," she said to Emma, "for, for all she dresses so well, she don't wear many different ones. I think I haven't only seen two, that grey with the braid, you know, made with a coat, and very plain—too much like a man for my taste—and the blue serge. Well, those two could easily go in that valise as she brought as well as the trunk. Then, what has she stuffed up the trunk with as it should be so 'eavy?"

"If I was you," said Emma, "I should lift it up by one of the handles one of these days and give it a bit of a shake to see if it rattles."

It was a couple of days after this that, as Mrs. Smith was dusting the bedroom and brushing the floor, she bethought her of her niece's suggestion. She did not at once carry it out, for she was a methodical little woman, whose work was very thorough. She finished what she was about, and dusted the

hideous objects that stood for ornaments on the mantelpiece—two shells, two blue glass vases, and a terrible china figure of Lord Nelson. She dusted the legs of the chairs and the table. She would have liked to dust the sunbeam which came in through the window. It was full of moving atoms which were irritants to her sharp eyes. She ran her cloth over the frames of the pictures. These were of her choice, and were of that make called Oxford. The pictures themselves had been cut from the almanacs which it is the custom of small tradesmen to give away at Christmas time. One was from “Hollises,” and was religious in tone. It represented a girl in a loose white robe clinging to a cross of stone standing on a rock in a boiling sea. Athwart the cross was a wreath of forget-me-nots, and on a scroll ran as legend a line of a hymn. Another had for its subject something more secular. A lady in a crimson evening dress was making cakes in a kitchen. A friend in a blue bonnet and a yellow cloak

was sitting beside the table, and was supposed, as the dialogue beneath the oleograph stated, to be saying: "What, you make pastry yourself, Mrs. Vavasour?" To which Mrs. Vavasour was supposed to be replying: "Yes, and I have found it quite a treat since, by good fortune, I was induced to try Blank's Balmy Baking Powder, sold by all grocers and provision dealers in sixpenny and shilling packets." A third was a highly-coloured portrait of a well-known woman in the London world, and done, as the fashion of hair and dress told, at the time when beauty was a profession. She would assuredly not have recognised her own face.

Mrs. Smith dusted all these objects of art with the greatest care. The professional beauty hanging, as she did, over the trunk, brought Mrs. Smith to the spot where it stood.

She ran her duster over the grey top, rubbed the lock and plates of brass, and was in the act of lifting the box by one of its



handles, preparatory to giving it a furtive shake, when Mrs. Fleming came in. She hurried forward precipitately.

“Oh, please, don’t move that,” she said. “There is some glass—a bottle inside, and it might break.”

“I was just going to dust behind it,” said Mrs. Smith, letting the trunk gently down.

## CHAPTER VII.

MRS. MANTON.

MRS. MANTON, the old lady of the house in Barn Street, was by no means dead. She clung indeed to life with a very wholesome grip. She was five years older now than in the days when Smith used to see her from the window of Sir James' opposite, and five years on to the threescore-and-ten of the allotted span, might have been expected to produce in her some marked change. As a matter of fact, they had done nothing of the sort. She was probably a little more wrinkled possibly even a little more grey, but her spirits and her interest in all that went on about her, and her keenness at her little card parties, and the zest with which she could discuss the scandals of the day showed no

appreciable decadence. Her age was possibly not of the order termed venerable, but she had few enemies except those which she chose to make for herself, and she had many friends. She was occasionally called a dreadful old woman, but generally with the saving qualification that for all that you could not help liking her. That she was clever and knew her world, there could be no question. Moreover, with an income that did not quite reach four figures, she contrived to keep herself in her own smart set, and while her means prevented her entertaining to any extent, she nevertheless dined out as often as she could wish, and was a welcome guest at the country-houses of her friends. Occasionally, she had been known to launch a *débutante* into society, and the ill-natured said that possibly it had been made worth her while. There was no very reliable authority for this supposition, and it died a natural death. Mrs. Manton herself did not mind what was said of her. All she asked of life

was that she might be allowed to enjoy good dinners and good wines, that she might be kept amused, that she might be sufficiently well dressed to escape unfavourable comment, that she might retain her luck at the card-table, that her dividends might come in regularly, that her servants might not worry her, that she might get a good tenant for the house as often as she wished to let it, that her clergyman might preach short sermons, that she might not outlive her welcome, and that somehow she might get to heaven when she died.

These demands seemed to her to be of sufficient moderation to ensure their fulfilment. In any case she found her life interesting enough to be well worth living. Gout was an enemy that occasionally menaced her, and she had periodical frights during which visions were vouchsafed to her spiritual and prophetic gaze of fingers with swollen joints, and feet that were crippled—perhaps of years of waiting upon a sofa. Dur-

ing these "scares" she put off the world and put on religion as a cloak. She sent her novels back to Mudie, and read a certain old volume of sermons, that at other times stood dusty and untouched in the back dining-room amongst such works as were rarely opened. The table with the green cloth would be rolled out of sight, and the cards locked up. Once she had burnt all the packs, which afterwards she voted a wanton pious extravagance, for, of course, she had to replace them. She would leave off her rings and her large and old-fashioned ornaments. They were vanities, and snares, and delusions. She would take the gay ribbons off her worldly caps, and substitute depressing blacks and greys. All this was for the advantage of her soul. For the good of her body she would substitute mineral waters for wines, and plain food for French dishes and lobster salads.

Then the mood would pass and she would rise up like the stereotyped giant, refreshed

with sleep, and, step by step, she would come back to the world. The sermons would return to the dining-room, the card-table to its place, the colour would come back to her caps, and she would permit herself to dine out.

“After all,” she used to say to herself, “you must have something. I have wonderfully few ailments, never had indigestion in my life, and don’t get bronchitis in the winter like other women of my age. You must have something, and the gout sends me to Carlsbad and Kissengen, while asthma, or lungs, or anything of that sort would only keep me to my room.”

But if she was worldly to the tips of her fingers, she was also intensely kind-hearted, and unknown to many people she did much that was good. She put aside a certain portion of her income for the poor, and she had even been known, at great inconvenience to herself, to put off one of her parties in order to go and visit a sick crossing-sweeper,

to whom she had been accustomed to speak sometimes at the corner of Barn Street, and who had expressed a desire to see her. This may argue possibly that there was some tenderness under all the coldness of her world-worn exterior. It was not much, perhaps, in the way of a good work, but it had involved a sacrifice, and showed that she was not entirely selfish.

In the winter whose winds were blowing so stormily round Brinville-super-mare, Mrs. Manton was a good deal occupied with two matters. The first was a grievance, and caused her endless regret and annoyance, the second, as the calamity of an acquaintance, gave material for much cheerful discussion. Her grievance was an answer to all those wonderings and speculations of the quondam butler of her old neighbour, Sir James.

“My nice parlour-maid,” she used to say, when she got upon the subject, “my nice parlour-maid whom I had had off and on for years—she left me twice and came back—

and who would lay a dinner-table as well as any man-servant I ever saw, and who cleaned plate so beautifully, and was so neat and pretty that she turned the head of every man who dined here, and who could make really good claret-cup—not sweet as syrup as most women make it—and who got through her work so well and quickly, and could dress hair and be lady's-maid whenever I wanted it—isn't it too trying to have lost her?"

A visitor who happened to be hearing all this for the first time, naturally put on a look of sympathy and asked gently whether the young woman was dead.

"Dead, bless you, no! Worse than that—married. After being with me all this time and being worth double her wages—though the other servants hated her and said all sorts of things about her, to which, of course, I would not listen—she must needs be engaged to a young man, a clerk, or something, in a coal merchant's, or gasworks, or that sort of thing—I was too indignant to inquire



—in Liverpool ; and he, if you please, must take it into his addle-pated head to declare that he couldn't, or wouldn't, wait any longer. Of course, I'm not surprised really, for, as I tell you, half my visitors asked me where I had got that beautiful girl, and young Saltash—you know young Saltash, brother to the present baronet, his uncle, old Sir James, used to live opposite—well, young Saltash was quite silly about her. He used to stop in the hall talking to her—letting in such a dreadful draught ; I used to tell him (it was no business of mine if he liked to make a gander of himself !) I used to tell him that if he wanted to flirt with my pretty Hanson, that was her name, he really must keep the hall door shut. You see I had the greatest confidence in the girl, and I know there was no harm in her. Dear me, there was nothing that girl couldn't do. She made all my caps, and could do up an old dress so well that you could scarcely tell it from a new one. And when I think of the stupid girl I have now,

she hasn't two ideas in her head, and I should positively be ashamed to put her behind the table to pour out tea on my at-home days—it quite upsets me. I have to get a young woman in as well as the man who comes to open the door. I declare when Hanson used to be here nearly as many men came to my teas as ladies. She would hold her own with 'em, too. She used to tell me the things they said to her, when she was putting me to bed, and I've heard her give 'em many a smart retort with that little tongue of hers. Jackson, that's a cook I had, declared that she deceived me in many ways, and I parted with the woman at once for daring to suggest such a thing. And really, if there had ever been any truth in it, though I am afraid it isn't very moral to say so, it would have been worth while being deceived a little for the sake of being so well served. And then for her to go and leave me! I said to her when she went, 'I am very sorry to lose you, Hanson, and I

am very angry with you for going ; but if your marriage turns out a failure, as I hope it will, and he should take to drink, or you should divorce him, or any other happy consummation of that sort should come about, just let me know, and I'll take you back.' She has been gone more than a month and nothing has happened. Isn't it provoking ? I will engage that if she had been some poor girl, who had nowhere else to go, her husband would have been immoral and a drunkard and a wife-beater ; but just because it happens that she is so urgently wanted here he will turn out to be a model of perfection. I am seventy-five, and the world is out of joint."

Mrs. Manton's old mouth puckered up in a grim smile. When she saw that her hearer was shocked she chuckled to herself.

"I have always considered," said the visitor austerely, "that beauty in that class is distinctly detrimental. I have sons, Mrs. Manton, and I have always endeavoured to

select my servants with an eye to an absence of feminine charm. I think one cannot be too particular. I choose staid and sensible women of more mature years."

"And don't you all find it somewhat depressing?" said Mrs. Manton. "As I have no pretension to being a Venus myself I like to look at the young and pretty "

As she spoke her keen little eyes were resting upon the middle-aged and plain.

"Wouldn't it have been rather shocking," said her visitor, "if any of your young men friends had entangled themselves with this person?—Mr. Saltash, for instance."

"Mr. Saltash," said Mrs. Manton, "has his eyes as tolerably wide open as his generation—or ours."

The boldness of thus classing seventy-five and sixty together quite took away the visitor's breath. She rose soon after this, making up her mind that she should drop Mrs. Manton's acquaintance. It happened, however, that where the footing of the old

lady of Barn Street was firm and assured, her own was but insecure, and she contented herself with spreading ill-natured reports about Mrs. Manton and her card parties—reports in which there was a suggestion that the pretty parlour-maid, whose loss so disconcerted her mistress, had possibly had a certain value as a decoy.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE ROBBERY AT MARKHAM ABBEY.

So much for the grievance.

The calamity of the friend, mention of which was made in the preceding chapter, was known to the press and the public as the Markham Jewellery Robbery. Mrs. Manton's interest in the case was all the keener from the fact that only a month or so before the occurrence she had been staying with Lady Markham at Markham Abbey in Wiltshire. Mrs Manton thanked her stars that she and Hanson, who had attended her as maid, had not been there at the actual time to be subjected to the inquisition which such guests and servants as were in the house when the robbery took place had been obliged to undergo at the hands of the police.

While Mrs. Manton was really sorry for her friend's misfortune, she still maintained that Lady Markham had only her vanity—not to call it by any harder name—to thank for the catastrophe. Lady Markham was not young, and should not have thought of such a dress for a moment. She had not the figure for it, Mrs. Manton averred for one thing, and for another the whole idea savoured of a certain display and want of taste. There was to be a fancy ball in the county, and Lady Markham had taken it into her foolish head that she would go as the Ice Maiden—she, at forty-five, and with a certain rotundity of form that made Mrs. Manton's mouth pucker to its grim smile.

“It is such a dress that only eighteen could wear with advantage, and even eighteen would have to be peculiarly endowed with grace and beauty—which poor Arabella, at two-and-a-half times that, distinctly isn't.”

But Lady Markham's mind was made up ; she had an elementary knowledge of drawing

and she designed the dress herself. It was to be white, of course, and of some soft diaphanous silk, and the great effect was to be the suggestion of frost in diamonds. The Markham jewels were a princely dower. She had diamonds enough to sprinkle herself more or less with flashing points from head to foot. There were to be icicles hanging from her fat arms, and on her plump neck, and round her ample bosom, and in her hair.

“There won’t be a dress like it in the room,” she said.

“Haven’t I read somewhere of a dress of the kind ?” said some one.

“Of course, it is a dress one has heard of before,” said Lady Markham with displeasure.

“I rather think,” said Mrs. Manton, who was a novel reader, “I rather think the heroine of one of Ouida’s books went to a ball as an Ice Maiden or a Snow Queen or something of the sort ; you will look like her, Arabella.”

“That suggested it to me,” said Lady



Markham gratefully, and Mrs. Manton looked round with twinkling eyes.

“And sha’n’t you be afraid of wearing so many diamonds?” said someone else; “the risk seems to me so great.”

“They will be securely fastened, of course,” said the hostess of the Abbey. “And after all, what is the good of having things if you don’t wear them? Half of them lie all the year round in the bank. Of course, I only keep just what I want in the house. But I mean my dress to be a success, and I am going to wear the whole lot.”

“Arabella’s going to wear the whole boiling,” said one young man to another in an undertone which shook in a way that suggested an imminent explosion of laughter. “She’ll make your eyes ache, I tell you.”

“She’s goin’ as a maiden,” replied the other in a preternaturally solemn whisper. “I can’t get beyond that.”

The two men went out presently, and Mrs. Manton made very shrewd guesses as to the

cause of the peals of laughter that could be heard issuing from the smoking-room. She herself was so tickled by the idea of the matronly Arabella having selected so chaste and youthful a rôle that she could not refrain that night from talking the whole thing over with Hanson. The maid had not read Hans Andersen's story.

"But you have read the novel from which I tell you Lady Markham got the idea. I know you've read it. I gave it to you myself. Think of the description of the heroine, and then look at Lady Markham."

"Diamonds from head to foot," said Hanson.

"You miss the point of it," said Mrs. Manton sharply, "you are more impressed with the magnificence of the dress than with the incongruity of its choice."

The subject of the Wilchester fancy ball was the all-engrossing topic of conversation during the remainder of Mrs. Manton's stay. Those in the house who were going to re-

main for it were full of their own costumes and of planning and designing. Patterns and coloured fashion plates lay about the rooms, and tinsel and stuffs came down from town for those who were entrusting their work either to their own fingers or those of local dressmakers. Hanson assisted Lady Markham's maid in arranging the classical draperies of the Ice Maiden.

"For," as Lady Markham explained, "the dress itself is not very elaborate. The silk must just fall in graceful folds about the figure, and the frost of diamonds, of course, is the real effect."

"It's not so easy," Parker confided to Hanson, "it's not so easy to make it lie gracefully where the figure is so stout, but it'll be sure to look well smothered in diamonds."

"Are they very handsome?" asked Mrs. Manton's maid.

"Oh, they're something exquisite," said Parker, "even I have never seen them all ;

they're generally kept at the bank. It'll be a frightful anxiety when they're here."

"I should think so," said Hanson, "where will she keep them safe?"

"In her bedroom, I suppose;" said Parker. "I'm sure I shall be glad when it's all over and off my mind. What a pity it is you're not going to stop for it."

"You must write me an account of it all," said Hanson.

"It does seem a pity you're not going to stop for it," repeated Parker.

Two days later, the diamonds arrived from the bank. The clerk who delivered the box was given a signed receipt, and that night the process of what Parker called "smothering" the dress in diamonds was completed. They were fastened on as securely as possible with the exception of such jewels as the wearer would put in her hair and on her neck. The "icicles" for the arms were fastened to the draperies at the shoulder, and were to be festooned to the bare wrists. Lady Mark-

ham had suggested their being fastened at once, though it made the risk of having the dress in her own room the more great.

The day before Mrs. Manton left, someone of local importance died suddenly and the ball had to be put off for a few weeks. Lady Markham was in despair. She had filled her house for the event and everything was ready. Still there was nothing to be done but submit to the inevitable with what grace she could command, and she renewed her invitations to her guests for the postponed function. Then came a difficulty as to the disposal of the diamonds. Mrs. Manton strongly advised her to send them back to the bank. Lady Markham said the dress would be tossed to pieces if they were detached from it, and that she could not send dress and all.

Why not?

Because she couldn't.

It was ultimately decided that the bejewelled dress should remain where it was in Lady Markham's wardrobe, and that it

should be "given out" that the diamonds had gone back to the bank.

"What was the good of that?" said Mrs. Manton to Hanson as together they journeyed back to London, "what was the good of that when everybody knew that they hadn't?"

Hanson's manner in the course of the next few days suddenly puzzled her mistress. The maid went about her duties in a preoccupied way, and she was restless, and her expression harassed and uneasy; she lost her colour and looked as if her sleep had gone from her. Violet hollows had formed themselves round her eyes. She was nervous too, and started if she was suddenly addressed.

Mrs. Manton asked what ailed her, and by so doing it seemed that she precipitated matters.

Hanson burst into tears.

"I am going to leave you, 'm," she said.

She seemed unnerved, but she was, nevertheless, very firm. The young man to

whom she was engaged would wait no longer and, with something that appeared more than mere reluctance, she said that she must go at the end of a month.

“Oh, nonsense and stuff,” was Mrs. Manton’s first comment ; “I can’t let you go. It is absurd to think of it, when you suit me so well. Besides, I was thinking of raising your wages as you have been playing lady’s-maid for me. I could never get another parlour-maid who would suit me so well. You can’t go.”

Mrs. Manton said this very firmly, and tried to put an air of finality upon the matter. It was useless, however. Hanson’s young man’s mind was made up, Hanson was very sorry, but she was obdurate, and Mrs. Manton had to reconcile herself to the fact that she was to lose the services of her nice parlour-maid. The grievance and the Markham calamity were discussed in equal proportions in Barn Street about a month later, when the new and stupid servant came in

and the papers were full of the jewel robbery.

More than ever when she heard of it did she wish that Hanson were back. It would have been a real satisfaction to have discussed the case with her. She wrote a long letter on the subject to the address in Liverpool that the girl had given her on leaving, as that of her future home and the destined scene of her married life.

The robbery had evidently been arranged and carried out by someone acquainted with the plan of the Abbey, and the habits of its owner and her guests. It had been one of peculiar daring.

In Lady Markham's household, as soon as luncheon had been served and the requirements of the dining-room attended to, a bell summoned the servants to their dinner, and the upper part of the house was left practically untenanted. It was part of Lady Markham's foolish scheme that no particular precautions against thieves should be taken at



this time, for she wished it to be supposed that her diamonds were safely reposing at the bank.

It was three days before the ball was to take place that at a quarter past two the front door bell was rung. The butler, who had just sat down to his dinner and was engaged in carving a turkey and indulging in animated conversation with the maid of a guest, said that it could not be a visitor at that hour, and asked a footman to answer the door. The young man rose and went up to the hall. A person, whom he afterwards described as a middle-aged gentleman, with grey hair and a beard and well-made clothes, and looking like a doctor or a lawyer, asked if he could see Lady Markham.

"Her ladyship is engaged. She has not yet come out from lunch."

"Dear, dear," said the inquirer, "I want particularly to see her. It is about the ball at Wilchester. There has been some mistake as to the number of tickets that she

requires. Will you ask her if she can see me for a few minutes? I shall not detain her long. It would be so awkward if, when the party had arrived at the town hall, there was any mistake about the vouchers."

"I will tell her ladyship," said the footman. "Will you step inside, sir?"

"Thank you, I will just stay here till I know whether she can see me, or whether I must come back later."

The footman left the door ajar. The stranger turned humming and looked out into the garden. It was afterwards supposed by the police that during the servant's absence an accomplice must have slipped into the house. When the footman came back the person, who professed to have come about the ball tickets, was standing exactly as he had left him. He wore a dark coat with a high collar, and a voluminous muffler was round his throat. The young man noticed all this and mentioned it casually in

the servants' hall in the course of the next few minutes.

"Lady Markham will see you in the library, sir." He led the way to the room in question and went back to his dinner. He had scarcely sat down and given his account of the visitor's errand when another bell was rung. The interview had not lasted long. There was no mistake after all. The stranger was apologising to Lady Markham.

"I thought it better to come so that there might be no delay on the night. It will be a very large ball—"

"It was much better to come," said Lady Markham; "I am only sorry, as it has turned out, that you had the trouble."

"It was no trouble, I assure you. I regret having disturbed your ladyship at your lunch. Good-morning."

Lady Markham bowed and went back to the dining-room. Her maid was going upstairs at this moment on some errand of her own. The footman let the stranger out

and was on his way back to the servants' hall when he heard a series of screams and a noise on the stairs. A man's figure with a bundle in his arms came rushing down and darted across the hall. The maid's screams took the form of words, "Stop thief! Murder! Help!"

The footman dashed off in pursuit. The man reached the door and opened it; he tried to slam it behind him. The servant caught it and was close on his heels on the drive. Then the thief turned suddenly and discharged a pistol full into his pursuer's face. The house was roused by this time. The guests came rushing out of the dining-room, and in the confusion of the moment the miscreants made good their escape.

The footman was carried into the house. His wound was found to be very serious. Lady Markham fainted. Half the men were out shooting, and everything was in favour of the thieves getting right away before anyone even started in pursuit. A

groom was despatched to Wilchester to fetch a doctor, and to arouse the police. Parker was in hysterics, and such of the servants and guests as were not attending to the footman, or holding smelling-salts to Lady Markham's unconscious nostrils, crowded round her. It was a long time before she could speak intelligibly.

She had gone up to fetch a handkerchief, she had a cold in her head (and, apparently, a love of trifling detail), and, wishing to blow her nose, she had put her hand into her pocket, and had discovered that she was without one—without a handkerchief she meant—and it was odd, because she was generally so careful; but she was sure it was providential in this case (the poor footman might have asked why!), it was providential, or she would never have gone up when she did, having just commenced her dinner, and having to leave it to get cold. Well, she remembered that she had left her handkerchief on the sewing-machine in the workroom,

and she was on her way there, when, passing Lady Markham's door, she heard some one moving about in the room.

“And as I knew her ladyship was at lunch I wondered who on earth it could be, so I went to the door to open it and I found it locked. I went round to the dressing-room to go in that way and that was locked too. I never thought of anything so horrible as thieves, and so I knocked and said: ‘Is that you, my lady?’ thinking her ladyship might not be well. She sometimes has the headache and lays down. But I got no answer, and I knocked again, louder—same as I do when I call her ladyship in the morning—and then I heard like as if someone jumped up, and the other door was suddenly unlocked and someone ran downstairs. And when I got round from the dressing-room I saw the door wide, and the wardrobe drawer broken open, and a man on the stairs with a bundle. Oh, I was too frightened to take much notice what he was like, and I took and

screamed. Oh, wasn't it providential that I should go up. If it hadn't been for the cold in my head, which I got through sitting at the open window, in a draught, on Monday week, and forgetting my handkerchief, which I do not twice in a twelvemonth, we should all have been murdered in our beds."

Lady Markham came to herself presently. She had not had such a shock for years, she said. It had quite upset her, and she had lost all interest in the ball.

"First, to have it put off," she said, helplessly, "and then to have thieves in the house, I declare, it quite damps one's spirits." Some one suggested a visit to her room to see to what extent her jewels had been stolen.

"It's scarcely that so much that I mind as the disappointment," she said foolishly, with tears in her eyes. "I had so set my heart upon the effect of this dress. Oh, isn't it too annoying?"

Even at this moment one of the guests

could not forbear to say, on behalf of the others, that everyone had been looking forward to seeing Lady Markham as the Ice Maiden.

“It is disappointing,” said the hostess gratefully.

She burst into tears when she saw her wardrobe. The drawer had been forced open, and the dress with the diamonds upon it was gone. The silk itself, stripped of the jewels, was found the same day in a ditch, showing, when it was too late, the direction the thieves had taken.

Every one exclaimed at the folly of having left such valuables in so insecure a place as the drawer of a wardrobe. It even had an ordinary lock.

“But that was just it,” explained Lady Markham, “I wished it to be supposed that they had gone back to the bank, and who on earth would dream of leaving several thousand pounds worth of diamonds in the drawer of a wardrobe?”



“Who but you? ’ commented one or two of her hearers under their breath.

“You see, its very improbability was what made it so safe. No burglar would even think of looking there for valuables, and if I had sent them back to the bank I should have had to have the dress taken to pieces again, and I couldn’t do that. So I would not even put them in the safe where my other ornaments are, but I just disarmed suspicion by putting them in the least likely place I could think of.”

“You never in your life,” wrote a guest at the Abbey to Mrs. Manton, heard such a confession of imbecility. Really dear, good, stupid geese like Arabella ought not to be entrusted with valuables. Not that she feels the loss of the diamonds very acutely. I believe she is suffering far more from the disappointment of not having been able to go to the ball as the Ice Maiden. She did not go at all, of course, and I had to chaperon the young people. It bored me to death, for I

had not meant to go at all, and I should have enjoyed seeing the party dressed before they started, and then have had my good night's rest, instead of yawning as I did in a dusty corner—the powder, you know, gets into the air, and some of the women had steeped themselves in it and looked such guys—till five o'clock in the morning. Arabella cried when we all started, and I think she more than half wished I would refuse to go, when, she said, terrible as it would have been to her, she would have considered it her duty to make the effort. I believe she really had some idea of going, for she produced a flower-girl's dress, which she said, with fresh ribbons, might be made to do. You may be sure I did not give her much encouragement. It really would have been hardly decent to have gone with that poor young footman dying in the house. I think myself it was a mercy she was prevented appearing at the Wilchester Town Hall as the Ice Maiden. Apart from the funny effect that we all expected,

she would have been flagrantly over-dressed. There were no really striking costumes in the room, and there was a great deal more of jingling tinsel than jewels. She would have looked as conspicuous as a red bonnet at a funeral. But then she would have enjoyed that. . . . We have all had to account for ourselves to the police, and, if it were not for that poor, brave, young fellow who lies dying, the whole thing would be full of comical phases. The servants are far more indignant at being questioned than we are. There is not the faintest clue. The man who came ostensibly about the tickets for the ball, was, of course, not sent by the committee at all. He just let his accomplice in. He was evidently disguised, for a grey wig and beard were found somewhere about the neighbourhood. No one knows how the men got away. It is supposed they must have driven to Pendon Junction and caught the up express. There was so much time lost in the confusion that no telegrams were sent till it was quite too

late to have the trains watched. It is very easy to be wise after the event, but the mistake was in sending one groom both to fetch the doctor and to alarm the police. The doctor was out, and the servant rode on to where he heard he was to be found before ever going to the police station. He played, as you see, distinctly into the thieves' hands. I scarcely think the affair will ever be cleared up. The police seem to think it is the work of a set of old hands, and they connect with it a man whose name or alias is Brinsley. But I do not see that that helps matters much. I am very sorry for poor Arabella, but she *is* such a goose. The person really to be pitied is the poor young footman. He has been quite delirious, off and on, for the last two days, and the doctors have given up all hope of his recovery."

## CHAPTER IX.

GEORGE SALTASH.

A MAN in an ulster was leaning over the sea wall at the end of the terrace at Brinville. He had a newspaper crumpled up under his arm. He had brought it out with the intention of reading it, and the wind had precluded any such possibility. He stood, a solitary figure, watching the sea. He yawned and looked about for some diversion. He was smoking, but for the moment his cigar failed to console him for his loneliness, and the deserted shore seemed to him a realisation of all that is dull.

“Are there no inhabitants in this God-forsaken place?” he asked himself, not aloud as a man in a book, but inwardly, and he scanned the desolate shingle. Not one, apparently,

was the answer, or it might be that the natives scorned the sea. The aggressive little pier jutted out into the water. Not a person occupied the lines of benches. Not a foot paced the boards. The tide was going out. There was a stretch of yellow sand upon which the waves were breaking in flat lines and with little sound. A steamer was on the horizon and he watched it out of sight. A few gulls were to be seen.

George Saltash yawned again, and thought seriously of going back to the empty hotel, packing his bag and returning straight to town. Why had he not gone to Brighton? He hated Brighton. Still, nothing could be worse than this. His doctor had said he must have sea air, and had suggested Brinville.

"The best air in England, my dear sir. Fine, open sea. Put you right in a fortnight. Now, do be advised. Try Brinville and you will soon be as well as ever you were in your life. If I let you go to Brighton you would knock yourself up there, and you might just

as well stay in town. Riviera? Nonsense, I know what that means—Monte Carlo and all the rest of it. I forbid it. Go to Brinville, Mr. Saltash.”

“I had rather have been sent to Blazes,” was the young man’s comment, as for the tenth time he retraced his steps along the terrace. When he reached the steps down to the shore he thought he would go down and throw stones into the sea. He was to be out as much as possible. If he had a spade and a bucket—. The boredom was demoralising. His very thoughts were beginning to drivel. If he could find some shelter from the wind, he could try again to read his paper. He sat down on one of the seats that stood in the recesses cut in the bank, and mistook a lull for immunity from the blast. He had no sooner opened his newspaper than the wind returned and swept it away. He rose and gave chase. The sheet was hurried along the terrace, sometimes fluttering up the embankment, sometimes threatening to whirl

itself across the shore and out to sea. It seemed to enjoy the sport. Occasionally it would lie still and allow him to come within a certain distance of it. Then it would rise up and start off again on its mad race. Saltash laughed in spite of himself. He ran on. It eluded him. He was close upon it once when, as if realising its danger, the paper, with a sudden bound, flew wildly over the wall, and was carried up to a dizzy height, whence it descended slowly. It had chosen a watery grave rather than capture—no, it had alighted on the pier, and the last he saw of it, it was flapping itself to rags upon a bar of the wooden railings.

Now he had not even a newspaper with which to amuse himself. Should he go and buy another, or should he have a look at the billiard table at the Imperial, or should he explore the town? He did not think he would be able to endure the place for another day—a week of it would be certain death. Without coming to any determination he left



the terrace and strolled up listlessly into Brinville. Fancy living your life in such a hole! There were people here possibly who had no better fate. It was the other end of nowhere, and if you wished to hide yourself effectually from civilisation, if you had committed a crime and wished to lose yourself, why, go to Brinville! Look at the streets, could anything be more dreary? Look at the shops with their cheap and shabby spread. Look at the people you met—an errand boy, a woman carrying a basket of clothes, a man loitering outside a public-house, some children, a girl pushing a perambulator, a fussy little doctor,—and what could be more hopelessly middle-class than the appearance of such of the wealthier inhabitants as chanced to be abroad that morning?

George Saltash was not favourably impressed with what he had seen at Brinville. He met the solitary waiter who had brought up his breakfast to the empty coffee-room of the Imperial. He stopped the man.

“Is the place always as lively?” he asked.

“Well, there aren’t many people here just now, sir. You should come down in the season. You can scarcely get a room for love or money.”

“Oh, Lord!” said Saltash, and walked on.

It was a few minutes later that he caught a momentary glimpse, in a window, of a smart, yellow head—such a head as reminded him of Bond Street in May. Hair, canary-coloured and classically dressed, it was full of suggestion! Could he have seen such a head—here in Brinville? It seemed unlikely. He looked up at the window whence the vision had been vouchsafed to him. The head, if head there had been, was gone. Either he had been mistaken, or else the daughter of some local doctor or solicitor affected a fashion somewhat in advance of the place. It would be interesting to see the hair again. He had not seen the face. He found himself speculating as to the probabilities of its being pretty. He knew well the type

o. face that goes with that type of head—the sort of figure, too, erect, tall, well-moulded, and the manner of dress, neat, smart, striking. The window was empty and he passed on. Presently he reached the library belonging to Mr. Basset-Hollis, the uncle of Emma of beauty fame. He paused at the window and looked in. One side of it was entirely filled with the guide book. Copies were open here and there, at such passages as might lure the casual reader to thirst for more. Saltash read that the bathing was unrivalled, that in the summer the Parade presented a lively aspect, that it was the “fashionable promenade of the visitors, the gay colours of whose *recherché* toilets made the scene bright, while the dancing blue of sea and sky, together with the strains of the well-known band, completed a picture, with whose elegance and attraction it would be difficult to compete.”

“Oh, Lord!” said Saltash again.

He also read that Brinville-super-mare was famous for its walks and drives, that the

excursions (particulars of which would be found in another part of the volume) were of such variety and interest as “yearly to attract thousands to our beautiful town.” Saltash groaned again.

Another window contained views of Brinville—The Town Hall and Assembly Rooms, The Marine Parade, The Pier, The Market-place, with Statue of John Brin, Esquire, The Sands, The Post-office, The Sea from the East Terrace, The Lighthouse, The Sea from the Pier, The Ruined Tower, The Gardens and Band-stand.

You could buy all this for a shilling and perpetuate your recollections of the place.

Mr. Basset-Hollis came to the door.

“You are staying in Brinville, sir?”

“I believe so,” said Saltash. He was not in a responsive mood.

“Then may I have the honour of including your name in our visitors’ list?”

“Oh, yes,” said Saltash. It was not worth an argument.

“You will find our guide-book to contain a fund of useful information, together with many interesting facts concerning Brinville, its environs and neighbourhood,” said Mr. Basset-Hollis in his set formula. “May I have the pleasure of calling your attention to the work?”

He produced a copy as he spoke.

“Oh, thank you, no,” said Saltash, shortly. “I don’t make any stay.”

“That’s a pity,” said the shopkeeper; “but I daresay having come once you’ll come again. People visit our beautiful town year after year. I am proud to say I am one of the oldest inhabitants.”

Saltash thought of the Frenchman who said of his native place: “Si l’on n’a pas vu Calais on n’a rien vu au monde,” and smiled. The instinct was akin to patriotism, which, as we know, is occasionally blinding.

“And the name for the visitors’ list, sir?”

“George Saltash.”

A man who happened to be in the shop

turned round quickly. He looked at the stranger and seemed about to speak. It was not till Saltash had gone some yards that he heard himself accosted. The man had followed him.

“I beg your pardon, sir. You don’t remember me? I am Smith. John Smith that lived with your uncle, sir, Sir James, in Barn Street.”

“Smith?” said Saltash, “I remember you quite well. Why, I once wanted to take you as valet, didn’t I? I remember. Dear me, that must be five or six years ago. And how are you getting on?”

“Pretty well, sir, thank you. I thought I’d just make so bold as to ask you how you were, sir. I heard you give your name for the visitor’s list.”

“And what brings you here?”

“I’m settled here, sir. I have my house here. I’m married, sir.”

“Oh, married, are you? I often wondered what became of you after old Sir James died.

I had some thought of writing and offering to take you then. However, I have given up a servant for the present, so, perhaps, it is just as well. Hard times, you know. And so you are married, are you?"

"Yes, sir. I married Susan Long, sir—I don't know whether you remember Susan, sir. She was cook to Sir James."

"Oh, you married Susan, did you?" said Saltash, but with no very definite recollection of the lady's identity. "And what are you doing now?"

"Lodgings, sir. You see your uncle left me a tidy bit of money, sir, and we thought we couldn't do better than invest in house-property, and I may say we've done pretty well, considering."

"And where is your house?" said Saltash, pleasantly. It was something to have found a soul to speak to.

Smith volunteered to show it to him if Mr. Saltash had time. Mr. Saltash declared that he had nothing to do.

“It’s close by here, sir,” said Smith, “just round the corner in Marina Place. You must have come by it on the way. There, sir. This is Marina Place, and my house is number five.”

“Not the one with the green blinds?”

“That’s it, sir.”

“Really,” said Saltash, with interest, for it was in the window of the drawing-room of number five that he had caught sight of the yellow head.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE GROUND FLOOR.

“So that’s your house,” said Saltash after a pause. He looked at Smith absently and then up at the window where he had seen the yellow head. “Your rooms are let, I suppose?” he added presently.

“The drawing-rooms, sir. The dining-rooms are vacant—two nice rooms, but we never expect a winter let for them. We’re very full in the season, sir. In July and August you can scarcely get a bed in Brinville.”

“Everyone tells me that,” said Saltash. “Happily I do not think it likely that I shall want one. I am only down here by my doctor’s orders. I have been rather seedy lately, and he insisted upon my coming down

here for change. Wouldn't hear of any other place. Well I have nothing to say against the air. I hear it is the best in England, and I have had such a blowing since I came down last night that I can believe very faithfully that there is plenty of it—but the town itself! Great Scott, was there ever such a hole! What brought you here, Smith, in the name of all that is wonderful?"

Smith smiled.

"I know what you feel about it, sir—I feel it myself," he said; "but I suppose I am getting accustomed to it, and I think I like it better dull and empty, as you see it to-day, than when it swarms with people and what the guide-book—written by a connection of my wife, sir—calls attractions. You see my wife had relations here, sir. That settled us on Brinville, and as I said before, sir, we're doing very well."

Saltash was looking up at the window once more. He thought he saw a flash of yellow as someone walked across the room.

“Who has your drawing-rooms?” he said suddenly

“A lady, sir, Mrs. Fleming. We’ve been most fortunate to get her—so nice she is and considerate. She’s very different to anyone we’ve ever had before in the winter, so smart and fashionable. Reminds me of London, sir, when old Sir James saw a little company in Barn Street.”

“Is she down here alone?” asked Saltash.

The subject interested him—but then Brinville was so dull.

“Yes, sir. Mrs. Smith and I think she must be a widow, though we don’t know. She isn’t in mourning, but as she never speaks of her husband, we think he must be dead, and we haven’t liked to inquire.”

Now there happened what Saltash had wished. The lady came to the window and looked out. It was only a few seconds before she went back to the other side of the room, but the young man had time to get a very good impression of her appearance. What

he saw was much what he had expected, a pretty face—it stirred some recollection of another, surely, or was the resemblance only that of faces of a type?—a brilliant complexion, dark eyes, a well-proportioned figure in a neatly cut dress, and, surmounting all, the shining yellow hair.

“That was Mrs. Fleming,” said Smith.

“What about your dining-rooms?” asked Saltash suddenly. “If there is one thing more depressing than another it is an empty hotel, and I am the solitary guest—with the exception of two old ladies who have their own sitting-room—at the Imperial. Another day of it—and another dinner in the coffee room would just about be the death of me. I have half a mind to move in to you. I could have the dining-rooms, I suppose.”

Smith remembered Mrs. Fleming’s question as to other lodgers. She had been glad, he remembered, to hear that there were none. Was he in any way bound to consult her before letting his rooms? She had probably

had in her mind's eye a family with racketting children, he thought. She could not object to a single gentleman. Besides, in any case Smith felt that he could not make a difficulty about taking the nephew of his old master. He would explain the circumstances to Mrs. Fleming, and he relied on her good nature to view matters in their right light.

"I'm sure I should be only too glad, sir," he said; "and I know Mrs. Smith would count it an honour to cook for you, sir, or any relation of the old master. Will you step in and look at the rooms, sir?"

Smith took his latch key from his pocket as he spoke and led the way across the road.

"I need hardly say that my wife and I would do all in our power to make you comfortable, sir. Mrs. Smith can still send up a little dinner that would not disgrace the old house in Barn Street. I'll fetch my wife, Mr. Saltash. The rooms are bright, sir, arn't they?"

Smith pulled up the blinds as he spoke.

The rooms were airy and of fair size. The sitting-room faced the front, of course, and was on the right hand side of the hall door, and the window was immediately below that whereat had appeared the vision of the yellow head. The bedroom, neat and wholesome, looked out upon the yard where Smith was permitted to smoke, but it was shut in by no buildings, and was free of access to air and light. The wall papers were of that olive green which to a certain class of mind is the only colour which suggests itself in such a connection. The pictures were showy oleographs in aggressive gilt frames. Smith would rather have had prints framed in oak. The furniture was a suite of the most orthodox description, and it had been purchased on the three years hire system. Smith would rather have attended sales and have picked up what was less of a pattern and more solid, but Mrs. Smith had declared in favour of that which had eventually been chosen.

“ You have it on monthly payments at a

redooced rate," she had said, "and at the end of three years it's your own, and then I should think you'd be very glad you hadn't had a chair of that sort and a stool of this and a table of the other, and a chiffonier all out of character. No, give me things that match. I like my room to be straight and tidy, and not filled nondescript like a curiosity shop. The drawing-room at Sir James' I always considered very shabby for all he was a baronet. Why, there wasn't two things of a piece in it, and it was full of cracked china as was bought second hand, and as I would not have had in my kitchen."

Saltash looked out of the window during Smith's absence. A gleam of thin sunshine illumined the boisterous day. He could fancy that with a good fire and a stock of books and newspapers, and his pipe alight and the green blinds drawn, the room would look very cosy, and he might be able to get through a few more days of Brinvile. He should write to his doctor anyway and tell

him what he thought of the place. It would be amusing if anything should happen to reconcile him to it. He began to compose the letter while he was waiting.

“I wonder how you had the effrontery to send me to such a place—a dreary, empty, desolate, God-forsaken hole to which I would shrink from condemning a criminal, and you expect me to get well here. I should like to shut you up in it yourself. You would not live long to prescribe your noisome tonics. Seriously, my good Brown, have you ever seen the place? Have you seen the dreary Parade, the deserted terrace and the forlorn shore? Have you ‘sampled’ the melancholy streets? Have your eyes ever rested on the glaring little villas and the rows of vulgar stucco? And above all, have you ever been the solitary guest in a second-rate hotel, in a tenth-rate watering place, out of the season? There is only one thing more terrible that you could have ordered me to do, and that would have been to come here *in* the season.”



George Saltash was smiling over his imaginary letter when Smith and his wife made their appearance.

Mrs. Smith expressed her delight at the prospect of having a nephew of Sir James' for a lodger.

"How fortunate it was, John," she said, turning to her husband, "how fortunate it was as I should have sent you round with a message to my relative's shop. Mr. Basset-Hollis, sir, the author of the guide-book, of which there's a bound copy on the table, is own brother to my sister's husband, and has been called the makings of the place."

"He must be proud of his achievement," said Saltash.

Then ensued some discussion as to the taking of the rooms.

"I shall want to smoke in them," said Mr. Saltash.

Smith looked at his wife.

"Oh, with pleasure," said that lady, "I'm used to that. Smith's a great smoker himself."

Her husband wished there had been as much truth in the words as there was cordiality in the tone in which they were spoken.

Terms were quickly settled, and Saltash went round to the Imperial to pay his bill and to have his portmanteau conveyed to Marina Place. That night he found himself comfortably seated in his new quarters. Smith had, on his own responsibility, moved a large arm-chair into the room. It did not match the rest of the furniture, it was true, but it was a great deal more inviting than the prim little stuffed-backed sofa, upholstered in the most assertive of crimson plush, which was the only lounging accomodation that the suite, bought upon the three years hire system, afforded.

So Saltash, having well dined—and Mrs. Smith's vocation had always been culinary—sat taking his rest in the chair which his landlord had so thoughtfully provided. A glass of whisky and water stood beside him, his

pipe was in his mouth, and before moving into the lodgings he had been round to the station and had laid in a stock of newspapers and novels. But he was not reading. He was lazily watching the blaze that curled so cheerfully up the chimney, and indulging in vague speculations about the lady with the trim figure and the yellow hair who occupied the floor above.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SILENCE OF MRS. FLEMING.

MRS. FLEMING, meanwhile, had been living her life in its normal quiet. She spent her days reading or working, or doing nothing. Smith observed her to look bored at times, harassed at others, but nothing really disturbed the even and uneventful tenor of her way. She seldom went out. Sometimes she would spend an hour or more in the bedroom, the door of which was kept so carefully locked. Mrs. Smith had almost given up wondering about the trunk. Her mind was not retentive, and she never again tried to shake the box to find out whether the contents rattled. There was so little that was at all remarkable in the lady's mode of life that by degrees the landlady ceased to

be curious upon the subject. Mrs. Fleming seemed only to have one correspondent. All the letters that were delivered for her at the house in Marina Place were in the same handwriting and bore a London postmark, and she herself wrote no others than those which were addressed to the care of Pelly's Library. Occasionally, when she thought of it, Mrs. Smith wondered about this. Emma, the type of beauty, constantly averred that there was something savouring of the clandestine in writing there instead of to a private address. "It looks underhand to me," she said; "same as I'd used to think it underhand of my friend, Miss Hawkes, to have her own letters, when she was carrying on her matrimonial correspondence, addressed to my care, so as her parents shouldn't know. I can't think now, however I could have agreed to it. Anyhow the way that affair turned out was enough to warn anyone from doing things clandestine."

"Well, I don't believe it's marriage by

advertisement, or anything of that sort in this case," said Mrs. Smith. "Your friend, Miss 'Awkes, was always what I should call a go-ahead, noisy sort of girl—look at the way she carried on with young Wilkins, the waiter at the Imperial, to say nothing of Jones at the tobacconist's, as had a wife and family and should have known better. There's nothing loud about Mrs. Fleming. I'm sure the quiet way she lives makes me quite wonder she doesn't find it dull."

"P'r'aps she's under a cloud," said Emma.

"Under a fiddlestick," said her aunt sharply. "I can't think what puts such ideas into your 'ead. I think it's all them trashy novelettes as you're so fond of reading."

Mrs. Smith forgot that it was she herself who had first given rise to this speculative gossip about the lodger. She had come round to her husband's opinion that Mrs. Fleming was in every way desirable. She had even ceased resenting the locking of the

bedroom door. Mrs. Fleming had a right to please herself in the matter.

Since her arrival the days had passed one as another. She was always ready to talk to her landlord when he came in to lay the table, or to clear it. Many were the conversations they had respecting the Markham case. Smith was of opinion that the lady of the Abbey had tempted Providence in keeping such valuables in so insecure a place. Mrs. Fleming agreed with him. She had been reading the case since first he had spoken of it to her, and she found it interesting. Smith was full of pity for the poor young footman, and hoped that the perpetrators of the deed would be brought to justice. It was a case of murder, he said, and it would be a question of hanging. Mrs. Fleming shuddered at the word. She was not in favour of capital punishment except in cases where murder had been committed with peculiar atrocity. Was this not a case of the sort? asked Smith. The poor young

fellow had received the discharge from the pistol full in the face. Mrs. Fleming argued that it was more a case of manslaughter. Probably the man who had fired the revolver had only intended to wound his pursuer. As it was he had not shot him dead. But he had died since of the wound, said Smith. No, to him it seemed a clear case of murder, and if ever they got the man he hoped they would hang him. Mrs. Fleming was of opinion that that would never be. The police, she said, had no clue, and, ten to one, the thieves were by this time well out of the country

It always seemed to Smith that, when the Markham case was being discussed, she argued with as keen a zest as he did himself.

"She's what I call a really sensible woman," he said to himself, again and again. His own wife took so little interest in anything that did not directly concern herself that to have found some one with whom to



talk over the events of the day, gave a new pleasure to his life. When, as was often the case, Mrs. Fleming and her landlord took opposite views, Smith gave his opinions with the greatest deference. His manners were irreproachable, and he always endeavoured to let Mrs. Fleming see that he considered it great condescension upon her part to be willing to talk to him at all, and that he appreciated it most thoroughly.

On the evening of the instalment of Mr. Saltash in the dining-rooms of the house in Marina Place, Smith went up to lay the table for Mrs. Fleming's supper as usual, and sought for proper words in which to inform her of the arrival of another lodger. He half felt that he ought to have consulted her, after what she had said, before taking such a step as that of letting the rooms. He tried to find some means of approaching the subject gradually, but failed. He was hovering round the table in his doubt when Mrs. Fleming looked up.

“We’ve had some one here to-day about the dining-rooms, ’m,” he said.

Mrs. Fleming moved her position and looked at him keenly.

“About the dining-rooms? About taking them, do you mean?”

“Yes, ’m—they’re taken.”

“From when?” asked Mrs. Fleming. “I mean, when do the people come into them?”

“It is only one gentleman, ’m—”

“When does he come?”

“He has come. He moved in this afternoon, ’m, from the Imperial Hotel where he was stopping.”

“In the house now!” said Mrs. Fleming.

“Yes, ’m. I hope you won’t mind there being another lodger. I don’t think you’ll find any annoyance from him, ’m. I couldn’t very well not take him for he is a nephew of an old master of mine. I knew you had said you were glad when you came that there were no other lodgers, and so I was sorry on that account, ’m. But I chanced to meet the

gentleman down here, and the last time I saw him was when I was butler to his uncle in Barn Street."

"Barn Street?" repeated Mrs. Fleming, "were you in Barn Street?"

She was poking the fire as she spoke and Smith was unable to see her face so that he could not judge from its expression whether or not she was annoyed.

"Yes, 'm. I was with Sir James Saltash for four years."

"Sir James Saltash."

Mrs. Fleming put down the poker. Indeed, it fell partly with a rattle of metal upon the fender.

"Yes, 'm," said Smith, "I lived with him till he died and the house was sold, and then I married soon after that and settled here."

Mrs. Fleming did not seem to be attending. She was watching the fire and an array of sparks which twinkled and moved and went out and were rekindled at the back of the grate. The flames blazed cheerfully out of

the gassy coal. One lump was exuding a stream of boiling tar. Mrs. Fleming was silent for so long that Smith feared she must be angry. Her work and her open book lay beside her on the floor.

“You were butler to Sir James Saltash, were you?” she said at last.

“Yes, ’m. Did you know Sir James, ’m?”

“I? oh, no,” said Mrs. Fleming. “But I have friends who were acquainted with him. And this gentleman who has taken the dining-rooms—he is some relation, you say?”

“Yes, ’m. Sir James was his uncle.”

“And what is his name?”

“Saltash, ’m,” said Smith, as he placed the last dish upon the table, “Mr. George Saltash.”

He pulled out a chair and stood behind it waiting to remove a cover before going down. Mrs. Fleming was still looking into the fire. She started when he spoke again.

“Supper is ready, ’m,” he said uneasily, and then he added with contrition, “if I’d known

you would have minded, 'm, I wouldn't have done it. I do hope you're not vexed, 'm."

"Vexed! I?" said Mrs. Fleming, "why should I be? You were quite right to let the rooms when you had a chance."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LADY IN THE ULSTER.

At the end of two days' sojourn at number five, Marina Place, George Saltash was fain to allow that he might just as well be at the Imperial Hotel for all that he saw of the lady with the yellow hair. He did not see her at all. He could hear her occasionally moving about on the floor above, but she never seemed to leave her own domain.

"Does your lodger—the lady upstairs—never go out?" he asked of Smith in as casual a tone as he could command.

"Very seldom, sir. You know she is not very strong."

Saltash did not know, but he could take the assertion upon faith.

“And she spends her whole day in the house?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I should not have thought that the best thing for an invalid,” said Saltash musingly.

He himself had been ordered to be out as much as possible.

“Is she young?” he asked abruptly.

“Oh, yes, sir. I should say she was not thirty—just about that perhaps.”

Saltash put on his coat and went out. It was blowing a gale. The wind was never tired at Brinville, and breathing the air deeply into his lungs, he admitted that it was doing him good. Already he was beginning to feel himself again, and to get back some of his pristine vigour. If only the place itself had not been so dreary! He scarcely realised yet the fresh interest that had crept in and was undermining the boredom that had possessed his soul. Two days ago he would scarcely have allowed that even the air had any charm. A few people were walking along the Marine

Parade. The more stormy terrace was probably deserted, and Saltash crossed the road and went along the top of the windy bank until he came to the steps. Then he descended and took a brisk walk along the road that led round the hill. He left Brinville behind him and determined to stay out till it was time for his lunch.

After passing the lighthouse the scene became more rugged. The shore immediately in front of the town had somehow acquired a prim and dreary look—perhaps that it might be in keeping with the tone of the place. Once round the point, at which the terrace ceased, the coast grew wild and assumed a grandeur impossible within view of the little brick and stucco town. Cliffs rose above the road, and below it the shore was strewn with rocks on which the waves broke and dashed themselves to spray with a noise of thunder. The sky was low and threatening, with here and there a break which showed a bit of blue. The sea was grey and



streaked with white. Under the rifts in the clouds it had a tinge of emerald that looked like a patch of colour let into a sombre stuff. Gulls were flying restlessly, and sometimes dipped. A steamer left a trail of smoke so thick and black that even the boisterous wind dispersed it slowly. A fleet of fishing smacks was in the distance, and a sudden gleam of sun caught their red sails and drew a tinge of green from the water it struck. Saltash stood still. The sun withdrew his transient ray as suddenly as he had vouchsafed it, and the fleet of smacks, and the colour of the strip of sea went out like the flame of a candle. Only that, in the murky distance, Saltash could dimly see a vague outline of sails, he might have supposed the sudden, gilded picture to have been an illusion. The wind shrieked round the cliffs. The spray from the waves filled the air with infinitesimal atoms of water and a pleasant taste of brine. When the pedestrian licked his lips they were salt as a shell or a sea-

pebble. A few drops of rain fell at wide intervals and came to nothing. The surcharged cloud sailed away to empty itself elsewhere.

There was little vegetation on the cliffs. Here and there in the interstices of the rock, some hardy plant had sown itself, and on some of the ledges grew a straggling weed or a few stalks of a tough grass.

The mind of George Saltash as he walked on in the wind was full of conjectures anent the lady with the yellow hair. There seemed to him something odd in the presence, at all, of a smartly-dressed woman at such a dead-and-alive hole as Brinville, and the fact of her indoor life suggested a desire to escape observation. Yet such a person as his momentary glimpse of her had suggested would scarcely shrink from the eyes of her fellow creatures. The elaborate tiring of the yellow hair, and the extreme neatness of the dress would show her to be not insensible to admiration or to the effect which her ap-

pearance might create. He had only seen her for a few seconds at the window, but he flattered himself that he was sufficiently observant to know the sort of woman to expect. He pictured her bright, sharp, witty, somewhat affected ; possibly a lady by birth, more probably not ; perhaps a married woman, but, in greater likelihood, of that nondescript class to which marriage is only a name. Then she would be, he thought, outwardly of the most exemplary conduct, would be luxurious in her tastes, spend money freely when she had it, indulge in fits of ill-temper when she had not, would enjoy good dinners and think herself a judge of wine, would wear diamonds in her box at the Empire, and have a following of smart young men with more money than brains and more folly than vice.

Her beauty would have attracted him any where. Here in Brinville the attraction was heightened by the mystery of her life.

If he could only meet her it would be easy to make some trifling remark which

might lead to an acquaintance. He could hope that his smoking did not annoy her—that the fumes of his pipe did not ascend to her room. He would have sent up a message by Smith when first he went into the house—whoever the other lodger might have been—had he not, in this case, been reserving the apology to make use of in person, when occasion should present itself, and he had watched for it zealously, but in vain. He looked at the hour and found that it was time to turn. The clouds were less heavy, the sea less grey, and the patches of colour had widened. The sun was peeping through the veil of vapour and was shining brightly on the road as he retraced his steps. The wind, which had been a hindrance, was now a help, and blew briskly against his broad back. He had not walked nearly so far as he had supposed. He seemed to reach the lighthouse in no time. He noted that the sea had fallen several feet from the line of seaweed and sticks and bits of wreckage that registered its high-

water mark. He walked along the terrace quickly. The air had given him an appetite, and he was ready for his luncheon.

Near the steps leading down to the shore he came suddenly upon the figure of a woman. She wore a neat ulster, and the shape of hat and head suggested a smartness foreign to Brinville. He did not immediately recognise Mrs. Fleming, for a blue veil shrouded the face and partly obscured the yellow hair. She held a stout stick and had evidently been walking. She might possibly have seen him, Saltash could not tell, but she did not turn as he passed her.

Here was an opportunity not to be missed. He hurried back to Marina Place, and each time that Smith closed the door of the sitting-room as he carried in his lodger's luncheon Saltash rose and opened it. His ears were on the alert for the click of the gate. Smith would have talked, but Saltash was pre-occupied and answered in monosyllables that were discouraging.

At last the table was spread and Saltash sat down to a well-cooked steak. Unlike the other lodger, he generally retained Smith in the room to wait upon him, but to-day as soon as the cover had been removed he said that he would ring if he wanted anything. Smith withdrew and shut the door like the careful servant that he was. As soon as he was gone Saltash rose and threw it open wide, and then he sat watching it and listening as before.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE VEIL.

THE glow of a blazing fire gilded the room and lighted up the face of George Saltash as he sat eating his solitary luncheon and waiting. It was a very pleasing face—not handsome in its strictest sense, but good-looking for all that. The eyes were grey and keen, the nose was sufficiently straight and the mouth firm. He wore a moustache and his colouring was fair. His skin was not so ruddy as it had been before his illness, but one could see that its pallor was not normal, and the fine texture of the flesh backed the assumption that he enjoyed a vigorous constitution and consequently good health. His head was small and his throat strong. He had a good pair of shoulders and he was well-

built. He had just enough vanity to insure that his indolence would never interfere with the neatness of his outward man, and even Brinville did not cause him to shirk his razor.

It was an attractive fellow enough who sprang up from the table, when at last he heard the click of the gate, and then a hand upon the latch of the door

Brinville in the daytime used neither bell nor key to admit itself to its own home. Consequently no ring announced Mrs. Fleming's arrival. Saltash held himself in readiness to intercept the lady as she should pass his room. He heard her in the passage, and in pursuance of his scheme he called out, "Is that you, Smith?" and went to the door.

"I really beg your pardon," he said, "I fancied I heard my landlord."

The lady bowed as if accepting his explanation.

"It was I who came in," she said.

Saltash was conscious of being reminded vaguely of some other voice he knew. The



hall was rather dark. The windows had panes of imitation stained glass which subdued the light and gave it tinges of colour.

"Pardon me," he said. "But you are Mrs. Fleming and have the rooms above mine?"

The lady inclined her head.

"Then this gives me the opportunity of asking whether my smoking in any way annoys you. I spoke to my landlord before venturing to light a cigar, and he declared that the smell of it was not noticeable upstairs. I hope that this is so."

"I have scarcely remarked it at all," said Mrs. Fleming. She spoke in a low voice. "And in any case," she added, "I do not mind the smell of smoking."

"Then I have your permission to continue the practice?" said Saltash. He was seeking to prolong the interview. He wished that the light were better in the passage, and that the blue veil did not so successfully shroud the face. He could only see the

bright eyes dimly. The veil itself was fine as gossamer, but closely woven and little transparent. It had a lustre and on this colours were reflected opaquely from the tinted glass.

“Certainly,” said Mrs. Fleming.

She bowed again and he watched her as she ascended the stairs. Her slight and supple figure, tall, well-moulded, was shown to great advantage by the clear lines of her ulster, and at the back of her shapely head some tufts of her yellow hair had escaped from under her veil. So much he saw. Before she had reached the turn in the stairs he went back into his room that it might not appear that he was watching her.

He wondered what he had gained—this, at least, that he could speak to her if again he should chance to meet her. It was tantalising not to have been able to see the lips that had spoken, nor the face, nor the eyes that must have looked into his. Probably the veil, all inaccessible to the gaze of the ob-

server from without, offered small hindrance to the sight of the wearer. In the case of a difficult interview, he was thinking what a pull a woman wearing such a veil might have over a man. Every movement of mouth, eye, muscle, would be concealed, and she would be able to note, as from a coigne of vantage, herself unseen, the effect of her words. With Mrs. Fleming, most likely, the wearing of the veil was merely a question of preserving her complexion from the roughness of the sea winds. It was improbable that she had any other motive.

At this moment she was perhaps divesting herself of the filmy shroud. How much he wished that he could see the face thus uncovered. He could imagine the white hands arranging the yellow hair that the wind had ruffled. Had she silver-backed brushes, he wondered, or ivory, or wood?

What in the name of all that is wonderful had brought her to Brinville, and, having

come, what in the name of all that is more wonderful still, kept her there ?

Smith came in to take away the remains of luncheon.

“ Brinville is not very lively,” said Saltash.

“ Well, no, sir, it isn’t just now, you see the season——”

“ How does Mrs. Fleming amuse herself ? ”

“ Oh, she just reads, sir, and works,” said Smith.

He moved some plates as he spoke.

“ Sometimes, I think, she doesn’t amuse herself much, either,” he added.

“ What do you mean ? ” asked Saltash.

“ Well, just that, sir,” said Smith, “ she looks so worried and bothered at times.”

“ Oh ! ”

“ I don’t think she looks very happy,” continued Smith ; “ when I go in sometimes I find her sitting doing nothing, but just staring into the fire with her head resting on her hand. And then she’ll rouse herself and talk a bit. She’s very kind you know, sir, and

often chats when I go in, but I hate to see her face look so melancholy. At other times you know, sir, she just looks tired and dissatisfied—like you were looking yourself, sir, when I met you ? ”

“ Bored ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ I am not surprised at that,” said Saltash smiling. “ Brinville and boredom seem to me synonymous. I mean nothing that is uncomplimentary to you, Smith, for I find these rooms as comfortable as they can well be, and Mrs. Smith’s cooking leaves nothing to be desired, but for your sake I wish your house were elsewhere.”

“ I can’t blame you for that, sir,” said Smith, and he spoke quite gratefully. “ I confess I am not fond of the place myself. It was a great change after Barn Street.”

The mention of Barn Street took Saltash back to old Sir James’ days and thence to later memories of the place. Barn Street was now chiefly associated in his mind with

Mrs. Manton. He wondered how she was faring. It was three or four months since he had seen her, for he had been hunting in Leicestershire and had only spent a couple of days in London after the illness which had resulted in sending him to Brinville for change of air. What was Mrs. Manton doing now? Were her little card parties, on the first and third Thursday in the month, in full swing? Was she at home on Wednesdays, and did the pretty Hanson stand behind the table in the back drawing-room and dispense tea and coffee? What was Mrs. Manton's last good story? She had always had something funny to tell him with her grim and cynical smile. How her old, worldly eyes used to twinkle over the accounts of the slips and follies of her neighbours. It was a jolly little house, hers, and whenever you went there you could rely upon being amused. He wondered what she had to say on the subject of the Markham robbery, for Lady Markham and she were intimate. He could

imagine the sharp little observations and burlesque moralisings that would issue from the puckered lips upon the uncertainty of human possessions. He had read, of course, in the newspapers, all the details of the robbery. He wondered what Mrs. Manton's comments had been upon Arabella, the Ice Maiden. Directly his fortnight was up in Brinville, and he returned to town, he would go straight to Barn Street and hear all about everything. How pleasant it would be to see London once more. He felt as if his absence had covered years. His few days at Brinville seemed lengthened to ten times their span. Was it possible that he had been there for so short a while? It was burial, of course, and the world was going on its way and he knew nothing of it. It was his ignorance of all that concerned Barn Street that made him realise how hidden he was, here in this little out-of-the-way place, of all that was passing in his own circle. He had not been to a theatre since the autumn, nor seen the inside of a club.

What was Hanson doing? Was she still with Mrs. Manton, and looking the smart, well-bred servant that she was? She was, indeed, too clever to be a servant at all. He had told her so. If she had a scrap of talent—and very little would do—with such prettiness as hers, and so trim a figure, she should have gone upon the stage. Perhaps it was just as well that she did not. She would have got on, though. He could imagine her in the chorus at the Vanity. She spoke sufficiently well, and for her class she made wonderfully few mistakes, nor was her accent bad. She would quickly have got a one line part. Her wit and sharpness would have stood her in good stead. Undoubtedly she would have got on.

She must have been a good girl, he said to himself, to have been content, instead, to lead the hum-drum life of a parlour-maid, albeit to so indulgent a mistress as he could fancy Mrs. Manton to be.

It was curious that following on all these



thoughts, he should have received a letter from Mrs. Manton herself that very evening.

She had been to his chambers in Duke Street, and had been told that he had given them up, and only yesterday had she met his brother, Sir Charles, from whom she had heard of his illness and had got his address.

“Though why you have gone to Brinville, of all places in the world, unless with a view to suicide or a natural death, I can’t imagine,” she wrote. “I once went there myself, some years ago, and, if I remember rightly, I returned by the next train.”

Saltash paused to exclaim, “Good old Mrs. Manton,” and then read on.

A long account of the Markham affair followed, and a description of the dress which was to have been worn at the fancy ball. The letter ended with a matter which occasioned its reader some surprise :—

“I know you will be sorry to hear that I have lost Hanson. I cannot tell you how I miss her, but you will easily realise this. She

left me some weeks ago to be married, and I have heard nothing of her since. I took her with me to Markham Abbey as my maid, and she was the greatest comfort to me. She was invaluable in every way, and so I find it a great difference to be without her. The odd part of the thing is that though I imagined that she was attached to me and really sorry, as she professed, to leave me, I have never heard from her once from that day to this. I have written twice to the address in Liverpool which she gave me, and my letters have been returned by the dead letter office with 'not known' written across them. It seems to me very odd, and I wish I knew what had really become of her. I told her that if anything should happen to separate her from her husband—and that sort of person is so quarrelsome, the man, I mean, not the woman—I would always take her back and be glad to get her. She was always attentive to me and took care of me if I was not well and saw that I had all that I could possibly want,

so that I am very much surprised that she has not written to me. Moreover, I feel somewhat anxious and nervous, for I think I ought to have made some inquiries about the man she was going to marry. Girls are such fools when they are in love. I know nothing about him, and, since she left me, nothing about her. I am sure I hope there is not anything the matter. I am inclined to wonder whether Hanson was telling me the truth, and whether she left to be married at all "

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MAN FROM SCOTLAND YARD.

MRS. MANTON was made a great deal more anxious by something which occurred the day after writing the foregoing letter.

She was sitting in the cheerful drawing-room in Barn Street making a cap. It was part of her grievance that she had to do this for herself since the leaving of Hanson with the talented fingers. Mrs. Manton had tried to instruct her successor in the noble art of millinery but with little success.

“Good gracious me, Jane,” she had cried aghast when the new maid had brought her the work of her prentice hands, “you don’t expect me to wear it and make such a guy of myself as all that ! Why it is like a cabbage

and nobody would see *me* at all. I should undergo a total eclipse."

To which the indignant Jane, who had only made the cap under protest and as a special favour, said that millinery did not come under the head of a parlour-maid's duties. She had lived in many places and had never been asked to do such a thing before.

The truth of this was not to be gainsaid and Mrs. Manton could only sigh over the loss of the servant who had spoilt her for all others.

"Never had to buy a cap," she said to herself, "the whole time she was with me, and one must economise somewhere. When I think of the stupid girl I have now who gets better wages, and can't lay a dinner-table respectably, nor clean plate, and is too ugly to pour out tea for me on Wednesdays, it makes me furious. Why on earth did Hanson leave me? I declare I'd give a hundred a year to have her back."

She was sitting then on this particular morn-

ing busy over the work which she now had to do for herself. It was eleven o'clock and she expected no one to lunch so she had thought to have a couple of hours to herself. So sure was she of being uninterrupted that she had taken off her own cap for a pattern, and the artifices were exposed by which a very little hair with careful management was made to appear like a great deal. Jane came into the room to say a man wished to see her mistress.

"Well, he can't," said Mrs. Manton shortly. "Who is he? What does he want? Ask him his business."

Jane withdrew, and Mrs. Manton readjusted her cap, angry that she should have been seen without it.

"I never minded Hanson knowing that I was bald on top and that all my front hair came from the back, but Jane I suppose will go gossiping in the kitchen."

The servant reappeared to say that the man said his business was with her mistress.

"Oh, I don't know anything about him,"

said Mrs. Manton, "I suppose it's some subscription. I can't see him. I suppose you'd better send him up."

Mrs. Manton was always contradictory when she was annoyed. She stood by the fire-place to show that the interview was to be short, and she bowed in silence as the man was ushered into the room.

He was a little man of nondescript appearance. He carried a brown hat under his arm and a note-book. Mrs. Manton supposed that he had called about the gas, the water rate, taxes or a subscription.

"You are Mrs. Manton?" he asked.

"I am Mrs. Manton."

"I shall not detain you long, madam. I come from Scotland Yard and I shall be obliged by your kind answers to the questions which I shall have the pleasure of putting to you."

Mrs. Manton pricked up her ears; that a detective—of the most orthodox type and with just such a manner as she would have

expected—should have any business with her gave a fillip to the dulness of the morning.

“You are acquainted with Lady Markham, I believe?”

“I am—intimately acquainted.”

“You stayed at the Abbey a short time before the robbery of which you have doubtless heard.”

Mrs Manton’s lip began to pucker to its grim smile.

“Am I accused of having participated in it?” she asked quietly.

The man smiled.

“It is not quite as bad as that, madam,” he said.

Mrs. Manton’s interest was thoroughly awakened.

“Will you sit down?” she said. She pulled a chair forward for herself as she spoke.

“You had a maid with you, I think?—a young person of the name of Hanson, Mary Hanson?”



“The best servant I ever had. Yes, Hanson was with me. What of that?”

“Where is she now?”

“Gone, I am sorry to say. She left me to be married. I wish I had her back.”

“Can you give me the date of her leaving?”

“Some time the beginning of January. The precise date? The fourth or fifth. I can tell you exactly if I look at my book.”

She opened a drawer in a writing-table and found an entry in her journal.

“The sixth of January,” she said presently, adding as comment that it had been a bad day for her. “And pray what has all this to do with the case? It all seems to me as irrelevant as the flowers that bloom in the spring.”

“I am coming to that,” said the man. “Left you on the sixth and the robbery was committed on the tenth. Will you tell me—”

“If you think,” said Mrs. Manton with sudden indignation, “that my good Hanson—”

“Will you kindly tell me where she is now?” the man pursued, interrupting her, but with deference.

“I cannot,” said Mrs. Manton; “for the good reason that I do not know.”

“Did she leave no address?”

“She gave me an address certainly—”

“But you do not know where to find her?”

Mrs. Manton was silent for a few moments. It occurred to her that the incident of the dead letters might have a suspicious sound.

“How may that be?” asked the man after the pause.

“Because I have written there and have had no answer,” replied Mrs. Manton reluctantly.

“What was the address?” asked the man.

“Is there much more?” said Mrs. Manton, “for I am getting tired. The address was Savoy Cottage, Aston Place, Sands Road, Liverpool.”

“Thank you. And your letters have

been returned to you by the dead letter office ? ”

This was a shaft from a bow drawn at a venture and Mrs. Manton knew it.

“ Haven’t I told you so ? ” she said sharply. It seemed to her that in spite of herself she was being made to admit that which might incriminate Hanson.

“ What nonsense it is,” she said crossly, “ to ask these futile questions. I suppose she has moved from the address she gave me. I know the sort of little house. I had a district once, and people take them by the week and the drains are always out of order and so they leave and go elsewhere. I’ll be bound that is what has happened in her case. Why Hanson was with me for six years off and on, and if you suspect her you are wasting your time, as I may as well tell you.”

“ Yes, madam.”

“ How he irritates me,” said Mrs. Manton to herself.

“ Was she married in London ? ”

“ In Liverpool I think.”

“ Do you know whether at a church or before a registrar, and where ? ”

“ No.”

“ Thank you. Do you know her husband’s name ? ”

“ Crofton, I think. John Crofton.”

“ Is there a servant in the house who lived with her ? ”

“ The cook. I suppose you want to see her ? ”

“ I should be obliged,” said the man, and Mrs. Manton rang and told the servant to send the cook up to her.

The woman in question made her appearance.

“ Have you ever seen the man with whom Mary Hanson kept company ? ”

“ Oh, yes, often,” she answered looking in surprise from one to the other.

“ Can you describe him ? ”

“ Middle height, I should call him, and very well dressed. He looked like a gentleman.

He had a short beard and moustache. I should call 'em black, but Hanson said they was a beautiful brown."

"Have you seen him in the house?"

"No, sir, he never came in. I used to see him from the area railings. He never came nearer the house than the pillar box. He looked quite a gentleman, sir."

"Can you tell me of any peculiarity he had?"

"No, sir."

"Think again. No mark or scar?"

"Yes, there was a small scar like a cut—"

"Where?"

"On the cheek just under one eye. I forget which."

"Thank you, that will do."

The cook looked again from her mistress to her questioner and withdrew. Mrs. Manton was sitting rigidly unresponsive in her chair.

"There is only one more thing madam and I have done. Do you know Mary Hanson's handwriting?"

Yes," said Mrs. Manton.

"Could you identify it if you saw it?"

"I think so."

The man took from his pocket a letter case and from that a bundle of papers. Mrs. Manton groaned with suppressed indignation at the catechism to which she was submitting.

"Is this hers then?" he asked holding out a piece of paper upon which there was some writing.

Mrs. Manton took it from him in silence.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A SCRAP OF PAPER.

“AM I to read this?” said Mrs. Manton. She looked at the paper which the man from Scotland Yard had put into her hand. It was a half sheet of writing paper torn from a letter. It had no beginning and ran as follows :

“ . . . when you know that I love you better than my life. It is unkind and unjust. I lay awake all last night thinking of what you said. Oh I wish that I had not told you what I did. It is cruel of you to say that I do not care for you. I love you, you know I love you. You ask for too terrible a proof. It is my own fault. I wish I had bitten out my wicked tongue before I told you what put the whole scheme into your head. But I love you and if you must have your proof you must

and I will do exactly what you tell me. You go straight up stairs. They are facing you as you enter the hall so you cannot miss them. The room is at the front of the house and over the drawing room. It looks out on to the lawn that you pass going up to the hall door. It is on the first floor and is at the end of the long passage which you will see to your left when you get to the top of the stairs. There is only the one passage—on the other side there is a red baize door leading to the bath room so you can't go wrong. The door you want is the last one on the right hand side of the passage. It is impossible that you could mistake it. It is painted white and the others are stained oak. The wardrobe you will see at once and what you seek is in one of the two drawers at the bottom. I do not know which. I implore you to be careful. Your success rests with Benson. It was a clever idea about the ball tickets but I wish to God we had never . . .”

The rest was missing. The page came



evidently from the middle of a letter. The words danced before Mrs. Manton's eyes. The detective knew the answer to his question before she spoke.

“Is that her writing?”

“I think so.”

The words were very low and her voice trembled. “Poor Hanson,” she said to herself, “God help her.” A change had come over her during the last few minutes. Her face appeared pinched and shrivelled, and lines were strongly marked at the mouth. Her head was no longer erect. She sat huddled up in her chair and shivered as if with cold. It seemed as though her seventy-five years had come out suddenly from their concealment and had laid heavy hands upon her.

The man who was watching her put out his hand for the fragment of the letter.

“I must ask for that back if you please,” he said.

“Certainly,” answered Mrs. Manton coldly.

“I have no wish to keep it.”

She handed him the page as she spoke.

"That is all I think, madam," he said in a business-like tone. "I need not detain you longer. Thank you, Good morning."

Mrs. Manton roused herself.

"One moment," she said, "May I ask how that letter came into your possession and what first led you to connect my unhappy maid with the robbery?"

"Certainly, madam. The letter was only found yesterday in an ash-pit. It is supposed that the thief dropped it in the room or on the stairs in his flight—he had probably taken it with him for his guidance—and then it must have been swept up and thrown away as rubbish. Lady Markham's maid happened to have seen some of the woman Hanson's handwriting and fancied that she recognised this as hers."

"Is anything known of the man to whom that unfortunate girl wrote the letter you have shown me?"

"Nothing definite—though we have a

pretty shrewd suspicion that we know something about him. The footman whom he shot was able before he died to give us some sort of a description of him, and the scar has as you see already proved of use as a probable identification. If this man turns out to be the man we think he will have to answer for considerably more than the Markham robbery."

When the man from Scotland Yard was gone Mrs. Manton scarcely moved her position. She sat looking at the fire with eyes that saw nothing. Her hands lay idly in her lap and her fingers moved sometimes with a nervous twitch which made the stones in her rings to sparkle as they caught the light of the flames. The cap lay unfinished in her work-basket.

She was more unnerved by what she had heard than she would have deemed possible. She had prided herself upon a certain amount of callousness, which had so far stood her in good stead on her way through the world. She had never been of the type of woman,

who gives in under adversity, or is over-balanced when she finds that she has been leaning for support upon a broken reed. She knew that presently she would pull herself together and stand upright. She was a strong-minded woman, and she could brave misfortune and the loss of her trust in those she had deemed true. She knew that after the first shock she would rise up a little harder, a little colder, and a little more cynical. But with all her consciousness of strength she was fain to own herself for the moment entirely bowed down. She had scarcely realised till now how dear the girl had grown to her, and to do her justice, her dismay was entirely upon Hanson's account. She thought little of the scandal that might be attached to herself as having had the criminal in her own service—nay more, as having taken her to the Abbey with so disastrous a result. This view of the case did not occur to her at all till the receipt of a letter which arrived that evening from Lady Markham, and was full of regrets

that affairs should have taken so unpleasant a turn.

“I have been bothered to death myself,” wrote Lady Markham. “I am sure I would rather have lost the jewels ten times over than have been subjected to all this fuss and worry. I was quite ashamed of the inconvenience to which everyone who was staying with me at the time was subjected, though they were all most good-tempered and kind; and now that at last the police seem to have hit upon a clue, I have the annoyance of knowing that if it comes to anything, and your maid—whom we all liked so much, (but you can never tell with that sort of person)—is implicated, it will be distressing to you, not only because I know you trusted and liked her, but also because it drags your name into this odious affair.”

Mrs. Manton had somewhat recovered her balance when this letter arrived.

“My name,” she said to herself with her grim smile; “I don’t care tuppence about that.

My name can take care of itself, thank God. What I do mind is the fate of that poor, unfortunate girl. She has evidently got into the toils of an unscrupulous rogue, and, goodness me ! what lengths will not a woman go when she is in love ? ”

Mrs. Manton was thinking of the dire calamity that had nearly befallen herself in the early days of her marriage of convenience. Only the death of her lover had prevented her from taking an irrevocable step. She had wept bitter tears, and in learning her own lesson had learnt toleration and pity for the sins of others.

“ If that poor girl loves as I loved, God help her,” she said.

The mystery of Hanson’s silence and of the return of the letters from the dead letter office was fully explained. Of course, the girl had never gone to Liverpool at all, and it was more than ever doubtful whether she had left Barn Street to be married. Mrs. Manton was a woman of quick and firm con-

clusions, and when she had made up her mind that Hanson was the tool of the man who had committed the robbery, it would have been difficult to shake her conviction. She passed over the sentence in the letter which had commented upon the scheme of the man called Benson and the ball tickets, and dwelt entirely upon such parts of it as suggested that the man to whom it was written had played upon her infatuation to get her co-operation in his nefarious plans.

Before going to bed that night, Mrs. Manton had entirely satisfied herself that Hanson had been the sinned against and not the sinner. The hours of darkness, during which Mrs. Manton lay awake, suggested perhaps a more gloomy aspect of the case against the girl, but morning found the old lady as firmly as ever assured that coercion, and not lust of wealth, had driven her to crime.

“I believe you would take her back still,” said George Saltash’s brother, Sir Charles,

who came in during the course of the morning.

He laughed, and Mrs. Manton had so far recovered herself as to be able to laugh too.

“So I would,” she said, “and be glad to get her.”



## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE STORY OF THE FALLEN COFFIN.

EMMA, the type of beauty, was full of it. She would talk of nothing else for an hour. She had seen in the twilight of the winter's evening a man enter number five Marina Place.

"It was Mr. Saltash," said Mrs. Smith for the third or fourth time. "It was Mr. Saltash, sure to. You see it ain't very light, Emma, and you was mistaken I expect. Why I've been mistaken meself. I once took Smith for your father, and I'm sure there's not much likeness when you come up close."

Smith found himself hoping that there was not, but did not say so.

"I tell you it wasn't Mr. Saltash," cried Emma vehemently. "It was no more Mr. Saltash than it was uncle. They're both tall

—Mr. Saltash particular—and the man I saw was quite medium.”

“Where was you,” said Mrs. Smith, “when you saw him?”

“I was coming down the path opposyte and I’d just reached Spiggses—you know, Laurel Bank where the children has the whooping-cough—when I saw him at the door, and he stood for half a moment as it might be listening, and then he went in. I saw him quite plain all except his face which was turned the other way, and I thought to meself, ‘Whoever are you, I wonder, making so free with uncle and aunt’s door as to go in without ringing?’ and I came on here making sure you must have comp’ny, and then you say as no one hasn’t come in.”

Emma was quite excited. Her story was received with incredulity.

“Do you think I’m making it all up, aunt?” she said indignantly, when that lady offered her plausible and commonplace explanations. “I tell you it wasn’t next door, nor yet Mr,

Saltash as I've told you times and times. It was here at your blessed front door, and he come in, whoever he was, and when you wake up murdered in your beds don't say as I didn't warn you."

"Go and have a look," said Mrs. Smith to her husband. "Go into all the rooms and see if there's any one. You might see, too, whether Mr. Saltash hasn't come in and whether it wasn't him."

The mention of Mr. Saltash's name was again as a red rag to a bull, and Emma Hollis began once more :

"You needn't ask him," she cried, "except to satisfy aunt. I know it wasn't. I'm sure I wish I'd never come to see you at all being as I'm not believed. It wasn't Mr. Saltash so there, and when you find all your spoons gone to-morrow morning you'll be sorry you didn't look about."

"You'd better go and see," said Mrs. Smith, indulgently, "as Emma's so positive."

Smith rose and left the kitchen.

“I don’t say as you’re not telling the truth. Emma,” said her aunt. “I only say as we’re all liable to error.”

“Well, we’ll see,” said the type of beauty. “You’d better leave the door ajar so as we can run for the police as soon as uncle hollows.”

Then in silence the two women sat and listened for sounds in the house above. They could hear Smith’s footstep on the stairs and hear his knock at Mr. Saltash’s door. The sound of an answering voice and of a short dialogue brought a look of triumph to Mrs. Smith’s face.

“He has come in,” she said, “and I know he was out, so it must have been him.”

“Well, it wasn’t,” said Emma. “He may have come in while we were talking.”

Ten minutes later Smith reappeared.

“I’ve been into every room,” he said, “and looked under the beds and in the cupboards and behind the curtains, and there is no one, and Mrs. Fleming hasn’t heard anything, and Mr. Saltash says he came in a little while

ago, so I should think it must have been him."

"It wasn't," said Emma stoutly, and bursting into tears of vexation, "it was a medium-sized man, that I'll swear, in a long coat and he had a cap on. I suppose you think I imagined the whole thing like that girl as had hysteria and came to the Imperial for change of air, and thought she was the Virgin Mary, and said she was attacked on the P'rade and had her rings stolen, and afterwards they were found in her boots where she had put them herself. I suppose you and uncle think I'm like her?"

"I wonder how you can go on like that," said Mrs. Smith with dignity, "when all uncle and me said was as you must have been mistaken. And so you must," she added in an undertone.

Emma was offended. She rose to go home.

"Shall uncle walk with you?" asked Mrs. Smith. Miss Hollis declined the proffered escort and took her departure.

"I only hope nothing won't happen in the night," she said, as her parting shot.

As soon as the front door had banged behind her and Mrs. Smith heard her niece's quick footsteps die out of ear-shot, she looked at her husband inquiringly.

"There couldn't have been anyone?" she asked.

"Oh, no. It must have been Mr. Saltash she saw. He wears a big coat, you know, and one is so easily mistaken about a person's height."

"Or else Emma seemed very certain," said Mrs. Smith.

Before retiring to rest she herself took a survey of the house, making her husband accompany her to hold the candle. Every thing was in its place and there was not a sign of an intruder, and despite Emma's woeful prophecies nothing occurred during the night to disturb anyone's sleep.

In the morning, however, Miss Hollis coming round early—like Darius when Daniel

was in the den of lions—to see what the night had brought forth, had the satisfaction of hearing that, although nothing had happened, her story had received some confirmation.

When Mrs. Smith was sweeping the dust down the tiled path that led to the gate, the owner of the house opposite her own chanced to be similarly employed. It happened that the neighbour was of a talkative disposition, and broom in hand she crossed over to indulge in a little chat. “I don’t know how it is,” she said, “as you have such luck with the rooms out of the season. I haven’t had a winter let I don’t know when, and there’s you with three lodgers.”

“Three? Only two,” corrected Mrs. Smith.

“Well, now, I said you’d only got two but my Kate would have it as you had three. There’s the lady in the drawing-rooms, isn’t there? —her with the yellow hair—and there’s the tall gentleman on the ground, and Kate would have it as you’d let your front second floor room, for she saw another gentleman go

in yesterday evening as she passed by. I said it was some friend of yours or your people's, but she said it must be a lodger because he didn't ring but just went in. Besides, she thought she had seen him before—late one night, I think she said."

Mrs. Smith was superstitious and a sudden and hideous idea occurred to her that perhaps the house might be haunted. She wondered who had lived there before her husband bought it. Could this be the ghost of some former resident? To her neighbour she appeared to be changing the conversation when she said :

"You've lived in number eight a long time, haven't you? Has any body ever died here as you remember?"

"Oh, yes," said the other with interest. She was content to talk upon any subject. "There was a gentleman died of brain disease about a year before you come. He had the first floor I think, and was took ill in the back room where he passed away."



“Mrs. Fleming’s bedroom,” murmured Mrs. Smith in parenthesis.

“And he was ill weeks and weeks,” continued the neighbour, “and one day all the blinds was down and we knew as he was gone. That was on a Monday I think, and they buried him on the Friday. Me and Kate stood at the window to watch the funeral. There was plumes on the ’earse and no flowers, and it poured with rain enough to depress anybody, and you know how slippery your tiled path gets of a wet day, well, in coming out of the house one of the bearers slipped, and I declare me and Kate’s hearts was in our mouths when we saw the coffin fall. It tumbled right over just where you’re standing and it stood upright against the railing.”

Mrs. Smith looked at the place indicated with horror.

“I remember it quite well,” continued the narrator, “because we’d asked a friend or two in to watch the funeral from the window,

and some one said it was enough to make the poor gentleman walk. And I've heard of such things myself. A lady friend of mine had an aunt whose remains was dropt in carrying to her grave and afterwards she was seen frequent. They say it disturbs the repose and the corpse can't rest quiet in the tomb."

It was soon after this interview that Miss Hollis made her appearance. She found her aunt sitting in the kitchen.

"Emma," said Mrs. Smith, "we was wrong to doubt you. I've had a terrible upset as uncle might tell you if he wasn't so unbelieving. What you saw was a corpse."

Miss Hollis screamed.

Smith gave a deprecatory gesture. He had argued in vain against this explanation of the incident which his wife's niece had the preceding evening recounted. He was still of opinion that it was Mr. Saltash whom she had seen in the dusk.

Mrs. Smith gave a detailed account of

what she had learned from her neighbour. "And I said nothing, of course, for fear of giving the house a bad name, but in me own mind it's as clear as clear. What you and Kate saw was the ghost of the poor gentleman whose coffin was dropt, and that ain't all, for Kate's seen it at the door before, late at night."

"What'll you and uncle do?" asked Emma, "I shall be afraid to come round now after dark. I might meet it again."

"We haven't thought yet," said Mrs. Smith, "you see the house is our own. You musn't go talking you know, Emma, else we'll lose our lodgers."

"I wouldn't like to sleep in the room where he died," said Emma.

"It's a comfort the room's let," said her aunt, "for I shouldn't be a bit surprised but what it was haunted. It's my belief I've heard noises in it lately—"

Emma screamed again.

"Oh, do hush," said Smith. "There are no such things as ghosts."

“ Oh,” cried Emma, “ did ever you hear the like, when me and Kate’s actually seen it?”

“ And I have heard noises in Mrs. Fleming’s room, whatever you say,” said Mrs. Smith, “ I’ve heard foot-steps, and once I thought I heard a voice, but what with the boards creaking and one thing and another, I didn’t take much notice, but now I know what it was.”

“ Why have you never said anything about it till now ? ” asked her husband.

“ Because I didn’t take much notice, I keep telling you. And supposing even as that wasn’t a corpse as Emma saw at the door, who could it have been as Kate has seen come in here late at night ? ”

“ I don’t know,” said Smith. “ I should think you ought to know better than to put confidence in everything they say at the house opposite. I have heard you say yourself what gossips they are.”

“ You can’t talk down facts,” said his wife. “ There’s Emma.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE WALKING OF THE CORPSE.

It was ultimately settled that, outside the immediate household, nothing should be said upon the subject of the corpse. Mrs. Smith was superstitious but she was also keenly alive to her own interests, and she saw the danger of allowing Emma to go away and start gossip about the ghost. She almost regretted having told her niece anything about what she had heard. Emma had a host of acquaintances in Brinville, and if it came to be supposed that the house was haunted, incalculable damage would be done to the chances of the lodgings.

“Of course, I don’t really believe in apparitions,” said Mrs. Smith, as the result of a little thought. “I’ve lived to my age and

never seen one, and so it ain't likely, and we all know how that woman opposite talks. Unless something more happens we'd much better not say anything about it. Don't you think so, Emma ? ”

“ Well, I know a lady who's seen one,” said Emma. “ I'll tell her all about this one, and see if it's anything like.”

“ Ar, I wouldn't do that,” said Mrs. Smith. “ Me and uncle think it'd be better not to say anything, see ! Just for a bit you know, because it'd damage our prospecks.”

“ Yes, don't say anything, Emma,” said Smith. “ You know it's all nonsense about people walking, and I'm quite sure you didn't see anything supernatural. I'll sift it out, you may be sure.”

“ Yes, uncle'll sift it out,” said Mrs. Smith, “ so don't say anything, there's a dear.”

It was some time before Miss Hollis could be induced to promise to keep her own counsel. It seemed a little hard that she should be cut off from so sensational a topic

of conversation. It was not given to everyone to see a ghost, and she would have liked to cap the story of the acquaintance of whom she had spoken. It was not till Mrs. Smith suggested how humiliating it would be if there should turn out to be no ghost at all that her niece consented to be silent.

“ Did you tell ’em at home about seeing the man last night ? ”

“ No. Mother and father was gone to a meeting.”

“ Then look here, Emma, don’t say anything about the whole thing. You see me and uncle don’t speak so free to every one as we do to you, and we wouldn’t talk unguarded if we thought what we said would be repeated. There’s a dear.”

“ All right, aunt.”

“ Promise ? ”

“ Promise.”

“ There’s a good girl. Ain’t Emma considerate, John ? ”

But when her niece was gone, Mrs. Smith

went back to her former attitude. She really was alarmed at what had occurred, and for the next few days she was highly nervous and dreaded to be left by herself after dark. Then by degrees her fears abated and her natural manner reasserted itself. Nothing happened for a time to give any further cause for alarm, and Smith was beginning to think that the affair would be forgotten, when there occurred an incident which brought back all his wife's terrors, and even occasioned himself some anxiety.

He was throwing food to the poultry in the yard one day, when he heard Mrs. Smith calling to him in a terrified whisper.

"John, John, come here at once." She was standing at the door, and her face was whiter than he ever remembered to have seen it. He put down the plate he was holding, and went over to where she stood. She was trembling and her eyes were dilated.

"It's walking," she said. Her voice was little more than a breath.



"What's walking? Susan, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

"It's walking," she said again. "I went upstairs to get my work, and as I was coming down I heard it."

"Nonsense. It was Mrs. Fleming."

"Mrs. Fleming's in the front room. I heard her poke the fire."

There was a pause. The fowls fought over the food. A hen had taken possession of the plate, and pecked the others when they dared to dispute her rights.

"We'll go up and see," said Smith.

They ascended on tip-toe, and stood outside the door of the bedroom. To Smith's surprise there was a sound of footsteps within. He met the distended eyes of his wife fixed upon his own in horror.

He beckoned to her and she followed him to the top of the stairs.

"Is the door locked?" he asked in a whisper. Mrs. Smith nodded.

"I expect so," she said.

"Then, you stand here and I'll get the key from Mrs. Fleming."

He went to the sitting-room as he spoke, and after the faintest possible tap he went in.

Mrs. Fleming was sitting by the fire doing nothing. She looked up as he entered. He closed the door behind him, and something in his face caused the expression of hers to alter from boredom to alarm.

"Is there anything the matter?" she asked.

A more observant man than Smith might have wondered at the quickness of the change, and have deduced from the spontaneity of the look of apprehension a mind on the alert for danger.

"Don't be frightened," he said, hurriedly; but her anxiety seemed only to deepen. "Have you the key of your bedroom? I think there is some one in it."

She started to her feet.

"Some one in my room," she said.

"Yes, 'm. Don't be afraid. If you will give me the key you can stop here, and if

there is anyone there I shall easily catch him. I'm pretty strong, 'm."

Mrs. Smith, terrified at being alone, now put in a white face at the doorway Mrs. Fleming looked from one to the other.

Smith put up his finger to enjoin silence, but Mrs. Fleming appeared to him to lose her head.

"Some one in my room," she said, speaking very loudly in her alarm, and pushing past Mrs. Smith into the passage. "Some one in my room." She went to the door, ignoring her landlord, and tried the handle. Then she thumped loudly on the panels

"Who is there?" she cried, breathlessly, "Who is there?"

"Give me the key, 'm," said Smith, "give me the key."

"I don't know what I've done with it," said Mrs. Fleming, continuing to knock upon the panels. "See if it is on the mantel-piece in my sitting-room."

Mrs. Smith stood by with teeth chattering.

“ Shall I fetch the police ? ” she said, every few seconds.

Mrs. Fleming listened at the door.

“ I don’t believe there is any one there,” she said, becoming suddenly quiet. “ Dear me, here is the key. Here is the key, Mr. Smith.”

The landlord returned and fitted the key into the lock. His wife shrank back as he opened the door. Mrs. Fleming peered into the room with apprehension, and then burst into an odd laugh. The room was empty.

“ How you frightened me,” she said.

She put her hand upon her heart, and went over and sat down upon her trunk while Smith looked about the room.

“ I could have sworn I heard footsteps,” he said.

A square of pale sunlight fell upon the carpet. All was in order. Mrs. Fleming watched him as he peered under the bed and the dressing-table, and into the cupboard.

"There's no one here," he said, "and yet I am sure I heard footsteps."

"How you frightened me," said Mrs. Fleming again. She seemed to be recovering herself. Mrs. Smith stood at the door. She was afraid to cross the threshold. Her alarm was only augmented by the sight of the empty room.

"I am very sorry," said the landlord, "very sorry, 'm. Mrs. Smith and I were sure we heard footsteps."

"We did hear them," said his wife in an awed whisper.

Mrs. Fleming looked at her quickly

"You see there is no one here," she said.

"Perhaps we shouldn't be able to see It," said Mrs. Smith. She glanced round the room, fearful of seeing the air thicken to a misty shape before her frightened eyes. The thin sunlight looked wan and meagre. Perhaps, though she saw nothing, she might be looking at the very spot where It stood.

“What does she mean?” asked Mrs. Fleming, addressing the husband.

Mrs. Smith answered for herself.

“It may be in the room still,” she said.

“In the room still!” said Mrs. Fleming.  
“How can there be anyone in the room? There is nowhere to hide. Mr. Smith has looked everywhere.”

There was a sound on the stairs. Saltash had heard the commotion and was coming up to inquire the cause.

“Will you go away, please, and leave me?” said Mrs. Fleming. “I am quite satisfied there is no one here.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE WALKING OF THE LADY.

SALTASH caught only a glimpse of Mrs. Fleming as she shut the door. He met Mr. and Mrs. Smith upon the landing.

“What was the matter?” he asked.

He noted the terrified face of his landlady and the trembling hand that took hold of the banisters for support.

“You look as if you had seen a ghost,” he said to her.

She shuddered and began to descend the stairs.

Saltash looked from her to her husband.

“I’ll tell you all about it, sir. Shall I come to your room?”

“I must come too,” said Mrs. Smith, turning round. “I daren’t stop by myself.”

“Well, come both of you,” said Saltash. At the foot of the stairs he went forward and led the way into his sittingroom.

“Now, what is it?” he asked, as soon as the door was closed.

Smith gave an account of what had occurred. When he saw from his lodger’s face that he had no belief in ghosts, Smith told the story from the beginning.

It was a relief to hear such hearty laughter as proceeded from the young man’s lips when he heard of the dropped coffin and Mrs. Smith’s theory that its ghostly occupant was walking.

“You won’t speak of it, sir, will you?” said Smith, “for the house might get a bad name, but I was sure I might tell you, and that you would not be alarmed.”

“Alarmed,” laughed Saltash, “alarmed! I see nothing to be alarmed at. Why, Mrs. Smith, it is as plain as a pikestaff that your niece saw me that evening, and the night I went for a walk down the pier your neighbour



opposite probably saw me as I came in, and exaggerated the lateness of the hour, and as to the footsteps—well, a hundred things might explain the sound.”

“I think it must be like that, too,” said Smith.

He looked at his wife. Even she seemed somewhat reassured.

“It hardly seems likely that we could have lived here all these years,” she admitted, “and not seen anything till now.”

“Preposterous,” said Saltash.

So effectual is the influence of a strong mind over a weak that before Mrs. Smith left the room she had regained some of her normal composure. This time she told Emma nothing of what had occurred, and after a few days, beyond a certain aversion to Mrs. Fleming’s bedroom which induced her to hurry over her work there in the morning, and more particularly in the evening, Mrs. Smith’s life fell back into its old groove.

Saltash’s fortnight was now nearly over.

He had been, indeed, in the house thirteen days, and, extraordinary as it seemed to him, no further opportunity had occurred of making the acquaintance of his fellow lodger. He never met her at the door or passed her in the passage. She kept entirely to her own rooms. The more unlikely it seemed that he should ever see her, the stronger grew his wish. He began to wonder whether she could be avoiding him, but as he could find no possible reason for such a course upon her part, he abandoned the idea. She had said that she was delicate, and he must accept this explanation, but it seemed to him inadequate to so mysterious a life of quiet.

It was two days now before his intended departure, and, odious as Brinville was to him, he was half inclined to stay on for another week. He was wonderfully better—there could be no question as to that; but he did not try to deceive himself into believing that it was upon grounds of health that he contemplated lengthening his stay. He lay

awake that night thinking over his plans, and speculating, as he so often speculated, about the lady on the floor above. A sound in the room over his made him think of Mrs. Smith's terrors, and he smiled as he remembered the fallen coffin, and the walking corpse. A neighbouring clock struck two. It was unusual to him to lie awake, but to-night sleep was a stranger to his eyes. It was, perhaps, ten minutes later that the stairs creaked loudly. He sat up and listened. There was a sound of footsteps, he thought, descending. Possibly Smith was coming down for something that he had left in the kitchen. No, the steps had passed his door, and unless he was mistaken, the bolts on the hall door were being drawn back. He thought again of the walking corpse, and the figure that had been seen late at night on the threshold. He jumped out of bed, and thrust his legs into his trousers, and threw on his dressing-gown. As he opened his door he was almost certain that the hall door closed.

Mrs. Fleming, in a white wrapper, was standing beside it with her hand on the latch. She gave a great start as she saw him, and, whether purposely or not, she let her candle fall, and it immediately went out. The metal candlestick had not fallen, only the candle itself, and the noise was slight.

Saltash stood still in the dark. He could hear Mrs. Fleming groping on the ground for that which she had dropt.

“Is anything the matter?” he said at last.

“Yes, no,” she answered confusedly, “I scarcely know. I believe I have been walking in my sleep.”

“You opened the front door,” said Saltash.

He moved along by the wall, and brushed against her where she stood. He touched her hand in the dark.

“Did I?” she said again. She retreated from him a few steps. Her voice was very low.

“I have no recollection of it. I must have done it in my sleep. I don’t know how I got

here. I used to walk in my sleep as a child. How odd that I should take to it again."

Saltash found the handle of the door and turned it. The door yielded; it was unlocked.

"You see," he said.

She moved along the passage towards the stairs as he readjusted the chain and bolts.

"I am cold," she said to him in her low voice. "I have been dreaming. I must go up to my room."

He heard her on the stairs as she spoke. The faint light of a neighbouring street lamp, coming through the glass above the door, caught her hair as she passed through its dim ray. He saw the flash of yellow, and the trail of her white robe.

He went back to bed.

The incident was curious, and seemed to fit in with the mysteries of the strange life. He thought of the start, and of the affrighted eyes that had met his own in the momentary glimpse that he had seen of her before the

candle fell. In that brief instant he had been reminded vaguely of some other face he had known. He tried in vain to trace the likeness to its source. He had seen so little, and, always, it seemed to him that something was between him and the full sight of her features—to-night it had been her yellow hair which had hung about her shoulders, and, like a veil, had helped to shroud her face.

He remembered the touch of her hand.

He would stay another week. So much he decided before he at length closed his eyes. Thinking over the incident of the night, he fell asleep. It was, perhaps, not unnatural that he should dream of it. He did not know how long he had slept, nor the exact moment when the real blended with the fantastic. He thought the stairs creaked again, and he stirred uneasily. Then he thought that once more he heard the cautious drawing of the bolts. He moved his position. His breathing continued regular, and his eyes were closed, but now he was sleep-

ing lightly Was there some louder sound as of the gentle closing of a door? He drew a deeper breath, and passed his hand across his forehead. He sank into easy dosing. His watch ticked loudly, and he heard it mingling with the sound of footsteps. Was it morning, and time to get up? Had he been called? He opened his eyes. The room was dark, only a paler darkness indicated the window There had been some sound. He sat up once more and listened. The air was cold in the winter's night.

Was not that the rattle of the chain? Again, did not footsteps—lighter footsteps, as of bare feet—pass along the passage?

He was wide awake in a moment. He sprang out of bed and opened his door.

All was dark, and all was silent; but something was disappearing round the turn in the stairs—something like the white trail of Mrs. Fleming's dress.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A SOUND OF VOICES.

SALTASH slept no more that night. He lay still thinking over what had happened, and trying to sift realities from the fancies of his dreams. He found it almost impossible to discover where fancy had ceased, and fact had begun. Of one thing he was convinced—it had been no sleep-walking which had brought Mrs. Fleming downstairs. For some reason or other, she had unfastened the bolts and chain of the hall door, and it was his firm conviction that, as she had seen him readjust them, she had later descended again, and had once more unfastened them. With what possible object? He rose and lit his candle and went to examine the door. The chain was in its place, the key had been



turned in the large lock, the catch of the smaller was down, and one bolt had been driven home, the other was drawn. Saltash knew that he had fastened both. He was not mistaken then, Mrs. Fleming had been back to the door.

Once more he returned to bed. The light was creeping now round the edge of the blind. A cock was crowing loudly in a neighbouring yard. The wind had dropped, and the dawn crept silently over a sleeping world.

What was the mystery of the quiet woman who stole about the house at night? If only he could remember clearly what had actually occurred! He must have dozed even after a sound had partially roused him. He tried to bring his mind back to the attitude in which presumably its perceptive faculties had received the impressions which were now so dim. Had he been dreaming when he had thought he heard other footsteps besides those which had so lightly pressed the floor

of the hall? He could not tell. He seemed only to have been really awake when he had sprung to the door in time to see that faint trail of white disappear in the gloom round the bend in the stairs.

The lightness of his attire—he had not waited to throw on his dressing-gown—had prevented him from following the inclination to dash upstairs in pursuit. So as he lay thinking, the hours passed. He heard some of them strike. He counted the strokes. At eight o'clock Smith came in and filled his bath. Saltash watched him as he placed upon a chair the clothes he had brushed and neatly folded, put out a shirt and socks, and stropped his razors. He wished again that he had the man for his servant.

"Eight o'clock, sir," said Smith and withdrew. He was wearing a striped linen coat, and this started for Saltash a train of thought which led him to a curious conclusion. Smith had been wearing this linen coat on the day on which Saltash had heard the

commotion upon the floor above. He remembered this now and the story of the footsteps—then he thought of the man who had been seen to enter the house in the evening and also late at night. Was there any connection between the footsteps, the man and—?

Mrs. Fleming had admitted some one to the house!

The conviction became a certainty. What else could have taken her down into the hall at night? The story of the sleep-walking was inadequate as an explanation, and at the utmost, it would only cover the first descent to the door. The drawn bolt proved the second visit. He was on the verge of some discovery. Be Brinville never so dull he would stay on now. He would take the rooms for another week—perhaps two. He told his landlord of his determination when he went in to his breakfast.

“The air is doing you good, sir. You look worlds better than when you came down.”

"I am better," said Saltash.

He went out presently to think over his plans. Come what might he would fathom the mystery. Even supposing that he was right in thinking that the house had a visitor of whom its owners were ignorant there would still be something for which to account. He had connected the sound of the footsteps in the bedroom with this hypothetical person, and the emptiness of the room when the door was opened would have to be explained. It might be that the intruder had some means of egress other than by the door.

He returned presently to the house. He was restless, and it seemed to him that every minute spent out of doors was a minute wasted. He must watch, as he had watched before, for an opportunity of seeing Mrs. Fleming. He wished that he could invade her own territory. A few adroit questions might disconcert her.

Disconcert her? Did he wish this? He remembered the touch of her hand in the dark.

Question her? What business was it of his?

For a few moments it seemed to him that this was the proper light in which to view the matter—that he had no right to pry into the concerns of his fellow-lodger. Then there came to him a recollection of her own explanation of her presence in the hall. The subsequent proof of its falsehood justified him in trying to evolve a true one for himself. He would listen now for a repetition of the sounds which had, on the preceding night, disturbed his rest. Since it was he who had made the discovery it was he who had the right to try and account for what he had seen and heard. Mrs. Fleming, by her assertion anent sleep-walking, had alienated him and had thrown him back upon himself.

An incident which occurred a day or two later deepened the mystery and strengthened his doubts. He heard a low murmur of talk in the bedroom above his own. So sure of it was he that he went to the top of the

kitchen stairs to ascertain whether Smith and his wife were below. He heard his landlord reading aloud, and also the click of Mrs. Smith's sewing machine, so he knew that it could be neither of them who was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Fleming.

Afterwards he was quite ready to allow that he "bungled" the affair, and to admit to himself that it was through his own "damned stupidity" that the thing led to no discovery. He did not wish to raise his landlord's suspicions. His own, so far as he knew, might still be groundless. The course which he adopted in his haste was immaturely considered and came to nothing. He told Smith from the top of the stairs that Mrs. Fleming was calling him, and it was his hope that the man on going upstairs would surprise the visitor. He went back to his bedroom and he still heard the murmur of talk. But directly Smith's footstep sounded the talking naturally ceased. If he employed the man at all he ought to have told him of his sus-

picious, and then Smith would have ascended noiselessly, have heard the talking and have challenged the talkers. As it was, he descended, evidently unaware that there had been anything to discover.

"Mrs. Fleming didn't call, sir," he said, halting at Saltash's door.

"Not? Where was she?"

"In her bedroom, sir."

"Are you sure she did not call? Did she open the door?"

"Yes, sir."

Then there had been no one to be seen in the room.

"I must have been mistaken," said Saltash; "I gave you the trouble of going upstairs for nothing."

He went back to his room cursing himself for his stupidity. Was it to be supposed that Mrs. Fleming would allow the unknown visitor to be discovered? Her ears must have been on the alert for a sound, and of course Smith had trodden the stairs in his

ordinary manner. His footfall was not heavy, but he was a big man and it was not so light as to be inaudible. When he had reached her door, of course, Mrs. Fleming had been prepared—the fact of her opening that door showed how well. He listened again for the sound of voices. If there had indeed been some one in the room he must be there still.

What was to be done? It was too late now to demand admittance. In any case he himself would have no right to demand it, and it was the sheerest folly to have sent Smith up to the room without telling him the truth. Of course, the secret guest had not been surprised. Besides, Saltash saw that his course had been inconsistent.

He heard Mrs. Fleming going back to her sitting-room, then all was silent. Would it be possible, he wondered, to steal up quietly, and in her absence examine the bedroom where he had heard the sounds? A moment's thought of course showed him the impracticability of such a course. He might



be disturbed. He might be accused himself of being in the room with felonious intent. And yet the intruder must still be there.

He wondered at his own keen interest in the thing. He even wondered whether it was altogether the mystery which excited him—whether, if Mrs. Fleming had been commonplace, old or ugly, he would have troubled his head at all about her. As it was his whole wish was to have his hands on the throat of the visitor for whom she would go to such lengths. It seemed almost impossible, but it was nevertheless a fact, that he was jealous of the unknown with whom she must be on such terms of more than intimacy. This was very ridiculous of course, and he laughed. It scarcely even occurred to him that in hunting him down he was also hunting her. He tried to persuade himself that it was for her safety that he was so bent upon unearthing the mysterious stranger. In truth he was piqued at her avoidance of himself. She had tacitly refused to trust

him, and he meant, sooner or later, to wring her secret from her beautiful lips.

Then when he realised that he was thinking of a woman whom he did not even know, whom he had scarcely even seen, he laughed again. He was becoming melodramatic, he said to himself, and, as he sat listening for sounds in the room overhead, he tried more definitely to analyse this somewhat complicated and contradictory frame of mind.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE FURTHER WALKING OF THE LADY.

SALTASH drank strong coffee that night and sat up reading and listening. If the stranger were still in the house it seemed to stand to reason that he would have to leave it, and it was the intention of the young man to pounce out upon him as he passed down the passage to the door. Twelve struck, and one and two. Twice he fancied he heard the sound of voices, but the wind had risen and was blowing such a hurricane that upon this point he could not be certain.

Saltash had heaped up a big fire in the grate. The temperature of the room was even and pleasant. The curtains were closely drawn and the sound of the raging of the gale without added to the sense of warmth that prevailed within. He had not undressed, but

had merely changed his coat for his dressing-gown, and having pulled the arm-chair up to the rug he was as comfortable as if he had been in bed. He thought it better not to smoke, for the fumes might ascend, and he did not wish it to be supposed that he was still up. The windows rattled and the house shook. He heard the breaking of the waves upon the shore. The sea to-night must be a splendid sight. His book interested him, and with ears always alert for a sound on the stairs he sat reading page after page. At the end of a certain time the letters began to dance before his eyes. He yawned and grew deadly sleepy. He would close his eyes and rest them but he would not go to sleep. Man proposes. He heard his own regular breathing. How comfortable he was, and warm, and how the wind was roaring outside. God disposes. His book fell heavily to the ground. He roused himself.

“Very nearly asleep that time,” he said to himself with a vague smile.

He closed his eyes again. Three o'clock struck, he counted the strokes and then with no apparent interval the clock struck six. He started to his feet. The fire was nearly out. A few red embers lay in a mass of flakey white dust. The room was cold. He looked at his watch. He had wasted that night, at least, and he might abandon the vigil which he had not kept and go to bed.

He stayed in all that day, and the night succeeding it passed without incident. An idea occurred to him on the next. Just over the foot of the stairs hung the gas lamp which gave light to the passage. The lead pipe which fed the flame ran up the side of the wall, making a ridge in the paper, and the tap for turning the gas on and off was just beside the lintel of Saltash's door. His idea was to relight the lamp as soon as his landlord had put it out and gone to bed, and to turn the flame down to the merest spark. This he did before settling himself for his vigil.

The hours passed slowly. The fire made him

sleepy. He would get up and pace the room to keep himself awake. On second thoughts he remembered that he would be heard. At two o'clock he looked at his watch upon the mantelpiece. Then came a brief interval and he looked again. It was nearly a quarter past. He must have dosed for twelve or fourteen minutes — and surely something was happening ! Was there not some sound in the passage ? He rose very cautiously and listened. He heard the click of a latch. Then on tip-toe he crossed the room and suddenly opening his door he turned the gas up. The result was not quite what he had expected. The gas had been partially turned off at the metre, and the light was dim. There was a subdued cry, and as he anticipated, Mrs. Fleming was standing on the mat at the end of the passage. She wore a white wrapper and her yellow hair was twisted into a loose knot at the back of her head. Without its classical tirings the shape of the head seemed to him strangely familiar.

"Is there anything the matter?" asked Saltash.

The success of his plan disconcerted him. Having caught her he scarcely knew what to say. Something in her attitude made him ashamed of himself. She was standing facing him with her back to the wall, and her hands hanging at her side. She looked like some magnificent animal brought to bay. Her eyes were distended in the dimness. He saw the rise and fall of her bosom under the lace of her gown. Her hair caught and seemed to absorb such light as there was.

"I heard a sound," said Saltash confusedly; "I thought something might be the matter. Can I be of any use?"

This was hardly what he had meant to say.

There was still silence. Saltash could almost fancy that he heard the beating of her heart. She put one hand upon her breast as if to still the tumult of her pulses.

The evening had threatened rain. At this moment there came a sudden downpour, and

the wind blew the drops against the hall door. The panes of glass in the panels at the side were lashed by pelting lines.

Still the lady said nothing. He thought she was making a stupendous effort to recover her self-possession. Her eyes began to wander vacantly round the passage. A sudden thought came to Saltash that she was mad. Then he realised something of the strangeness of the scene that was being acted here, in the dead of night, in the hall of a cheap little house in Brinville. Her eyes made big and wild by their distension were traversing the walls. Presently they lighted upon Saltash as he stood by his door. The lady gave a sudden start, and passed her hands across her forehead.

“How did I get here?” she asked.

Saltash looked at her in surprise. The expression of her face was rational enough. She was as sane as he. He saw that at once.

‘I believe I have been walking in my sleep again,’ she said.



For a moment Saltash was almost taken in. Then he saw through her strategem.

“And in your sleep,” he said, “have again unlocked the door?”

She looked at him quickly. He saw how her hands were trembling. But she had taken a wrong course in trying to throw dust into his eyes. Something that was antagonistic to her rose in his mind. She had attempted to deceive him. Now she must answer his questions. He advanced a few steps towards her.

“It is late,” she said in her low voice, “I must go up.”

He stood in her path blocking the narrow passage.

“No,” said Saltash. “This has happened before. There is something to explain.”

“I have explained,” she answered, “what is more simple? I went to bed three hours ago, I know nothing since, till I suddenly found myself here.”

“You did not look like a sonnambulist

when I turned up the light," said Saltash. "It did not occur to you that you were asleep till quite a minute after that."

He saw again her bosom rise and fall as the shaft struck home. Her delicate nostrils were dilated to allow a freer passage to the panting breaths that followed each other in such quick succession.

"I can only tell you," she said, "that I do not know how I got here."

"I believed you when you told me that—the first of the occasions upon which you came down to the door the other night. You came down again."

"First?—again—what do you mean?"

"You came down again later," said Saltash. "I heard you, and I saw the end—trail—train—" he stumbled over the words seeking the right one—"of your dress just disappearing round the turn of the banisters." He pointed up as he spoke to the bend in the staircase. Mrs. Fleming's eyes followed the direction of his own.

"Were you walking in your sleep then?"

"When?"

"That second time."

"There — was no second time."

"Unfortunately I found proof of your second visit to the door. I remember distinctly bolting it in both places when I found the fastenings undone—you may remember that yourself—I returned afterwards and found one bolt drawn."

"Mr. Smith may have opened the door in the meantime."

"He was not down. It was still night."

Mrs. Fleming was silent. The wind blew a louder gust and the door rattled.

"You see that it is unfastened now," said Saltash.

"It may have been so all night."

"It was not," said Saltash, "I heard Smith lock and bolt it at ten o'clock."

Suddenly Mrs. Fleming abandoned the defensive.

"And if I did open the door," she said sud-

denly, "what business is it of yours? I was here before ever you came."

How like she was to some one he knew. Always the brilliant yellow of the hair seemed to baffle him.

"Let me pass," she said.

"Not unless you tell me whom you have let into the house."

"Let into the house," she repeated. "You think I have let some one in?"

Saltash nodded. There was a long pause. It was filled by the battering of the rain. Mrs. Fleming seemed to be thinking, then she spoke.

"And where do you think they are?" she asked, using the plural pronoun to cover sex.

"In your rooms, I suppose."

Mrs. Fleming thought again.

"You may go and look," she said then, "I give you leave. How dare you think such a thing? It is hideous that I should have to vindicate myself like this and to a stranger. I should be greatly compromised if any one should come down and find you there."

It was not a ladylike speech. Saltash said nothing.

“But it seems to me,” she added, “that I run more danger of being compromised by your staying where you are and holding to your blind conviction. Go and search my rooms. I tell you to. I wish you to. Go. Do you hear?”

Saltash still hung back. He was wishing that he had let the matter rest. He ought to have cautioned Smith and to have gone back to town on the day that he had originally fixed for his departure.

“Go, do you hear me?” said Mrs. Fleming again, “I will wait here till you come back.”

Thus adjured and feeling very uncomfortable, Saltash fetched a candle, took off his slippers, and ascended the stairs silently. He entered Mrs. Fleming’s sitting-room. It was much the same shape as his own. He looked under the table. There was no other possible hiding-place. Then he went to the second

room ; a certain sense of delicacy hurried him in his search. The bed had not been slept in, he saw. There was no one in the room. The gas was burning, and the only thing to arouse his suspicions was the fact that two chairs were drawn up before the fire. There was nothing to lead him to suppose that both had been recently occupied, but that was his conviction. He looked into the cupboard where hung Mrs. Fleming's dresses, and he even lifted the trunk to discover by its weight whether anyone could be concealed within. It was quite light.

When he descended to the hall Mrs. Fleming was standing exactly as he had left her.

"What did you find?" she asked.

"Two chairs drawn up before the fire."

"I had my feet on one of them."

To the dim light of the gas had now been added the light of the candle which Saltash still held. Up to this moment he had never seen Mrs. Fleming clearly, now something in what he saw made his pulses to leap. He went up to her and held his candle so that the

light fell fully on her face. She did not flinch though the effort to maintain her composure must have been terrible. He looked straight into her brown eyes and he recognised her, and recognising, saw that she knew him.

There was a long pause and then in as quiet a voice as he could command, he said :

“Why have you dyed your hair, Hanson?”

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CONJECTURE OF SALTASH.

“ RUN to earth, sir,” said Hanson after a long and terrible pause. For the life of her she could not keep the “sir” out of her sentence. From the moment of recognition she was the woman of the people and he her mistress’ guest. Their relative positions were at once established.

“And what does it all mean?” said Saltash kindly. “Why couldn’t you have trusted me, Mary? If you are in trouble I would have helped you for the sake of old times. What does it all mean?”

The woman who was known as Mrs. Fleming was crying. She shook her head and did not answer.

“How odd it is my finding you here,” said



Saltash, seeing that he got no reply “I only heard from Mrs. Manton last week, and she was full of distress at your having left her. She told me that she did not know what had become of you, Mary.”

He tried to take her hand, but she shrank back.

“You wouldn’t if you knew,” she said.

He looked at the yellow hair and the tinted face, and he sighed for the fresher beauty that he remembered.

“I can guess,” he said in a low voice, “I am very sorry. But I can understand. I know how girls are tempted, and your beauty—”

“Oh, it isn’t that,” she said quickly. “It is worse than that—well, perhaps, not worse—I don’t know. I wish I was dead, that’s all.”

Saltash listened in bewilderment. His inference had been so natural.

“Go back to Mrs. Manton,” he said.

“My God! I wish I could,” she answered.

A hundred questions rose to his lips.

“Then what does it all mean?” he said again, “and why haven’t you written to Mrs. Manton?”

“Because I can’t, I can’t,” she answered, “and she was so good to me.”

“Won’t you tell me why?”

“I daresay you will know why soon enough,” she said. “This can’t go on much longer. But I can’t tell you anything now. I can only ask you not to question me, and—not to watch me. You will even save yourself something by knowing nothing about me, perhaps. Now I had better go. Will you, as the greatest possible kindness to me, say nothing of what you know—neither to Smith nor to Mrs. Manton?”

Saltash nodded.

“And there is something more—don’t, for God’s sake, don’t listen for sounds.”

She paused. Grotesque shadows thrown by the candle were playing on the walls.

“I may as well tell you,” she added, with

sudden resolution, "that I shall be down at the door again, to-night."

She turned then and began to ascend the stairs. A pin dropped from the heavy knot at the back of her head, and, like a rain of gold, her yellow hair fell about her shoulders. He watched her pass out of sight round the bend in the stairs, and then he went back to his room.

The events of the last half-hour seemed like a dream. He had left the gas burning in the passage, and remembering this presently he put it out. There was no use going to bed yet, so he lit a pipe, and replenished the fire. Then he sat down before it to think. What could be this secret of Hanson's which had brought her to Brinville, and had induced her to stain her hair? It was a disguise then, and the suggestion in Mrs. Fleming's appearance of the smart courtesan was only the result of the attempt of a woman of the masses to adopt the dress and fashion of a class above her own. He

compared her present beauty with the beauty that he remembered. She was brilliant now as she had never been brilliant before. Her skin was far more delicately tinted, and her eyes seemed larger, and deeper, and were more darkly shaded than in the old days, when nature was responsible for her looks. But her freshness was gone. She had labelled herself the woman of thirty, at that age she had been born, at that age she would remain—this was the legend he read across her face in common with others of its type.

He could think of no possible cause for the effects that were puzzling him, other than that which he had suggested, and which she had refuted. The earnestness of her manner, and the desperate struggle she had made before he recognised her, to brave the situation by sheer daring, showed him how dire that situation must be. By such means as lay in her power she would have averted a revelation of her identity. Then, at length,

when the hopelessness of her case had been made plain to her, she had admitted that he had guessed her secret, but by asking him not to question her, and throwing herself, so to speak, upon his mercy—heaven knew why!—she had cut the ground from under his feet. The mystery was ten times increased, and he must not try to solve it. Even at this moment he could hear the sound of her returning footsteps. She was unfastening the door, and he must not listen. Then a current of air swept into the house, and he heard the louder pelting of the rain. After that there were footsteps once more on the oil-cloth, and he must not try to discover what was passing within a few yards of where he sat, and on the other side of a thin wall of lath and plaster. The more he thought of it, the less he liked it. Was ever man placed in so uncomfortable a position? There could be no question as to the compromising nature of all that had come to his knowledge. Mrs. Fleming—no, Hanson for it was in

that character that she had then spoken—had warned him for his own sake, to refrain from trying to learn more than he already knew. He half wished that he had never moved from the Imperial Hotel. He would not have moved from thence if he had not met Smith ; he would not have met Smith if he had not come to Brinville, he would not have come to Brinville if he had not been ill ; he would not have been ill, if he had not sat in wet clothes after being drenched to the skin one day in Leicestershire. A heavy shower, then, was responsible for his present predicament. This conclusion drew his attention to the rain that was being driven in such gusts against the window. If any one had been let into the house to-night, there would be traces of water upon the floor of the passage. He deliberated for some moments before he went to see. Not till he had satisfied himself that he would, at least, not be acting dishonestly to the woman who had claimed his pity, did he go to the door to satisfy himself upon this

point. The light of his candle glistened upon a little trail of drops reaching from the mat to the foot of the stairs.

In deeper meditation than before George Saltash returned to his chair by the fire. He sat down slowly. His forehead was marked by lines and unconsciously he was frowning. He knew now why Mrs. Fleming—she had been Mrs. Fleming then—had allowed him to search her room. It was small wonder that he had found no one. Whoever had occupied the second chair that he had seen drawn up before the hearth had then just left the house. Mrs. Fleming had not descended to the hall to admit but to let some one out. Since, she had gone back to the door, as she had said was her intention, and the tell-tale trace of the drops was full of import. The inference was that the stranger was no mere visitor but that he was living in the house. It was he who had been seen by Mrs. Smith's niece and by the daughter of the neighbour. It was the sound of his footsteps that had been heard in

Mrs. Fleming's room. It was he who had been in conversation with its legitimate occupant on the occasion when Saltash hearing voices had sent the landlord upstairs on a fool's errand. Then who could this mysterious person be, and with what possible object was he living in hiding here? Saltash remembered to have heard from Mrs. Smith that Mrs. Fleming kept the door of her bedroom constantly locked. Mrs. Smith had been talking about her and had mentioned this fact amongst others. Mrs. Smith had said that she supposed Mrs. Fleming had valuables and feared that they might be stolen. At the time this had sounded plausible enough but Saltash thought now that he had found the true reason for the turning of the key. In all probability the room was occupied all day long. The only possible conclusion that the young man could arrive at was that the unknown was a criminal hiding from justice, and that Mrs. Manton's quondam parlour-maid was assisting him to evade the vigilance of the law.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### HUNTED DOWN.

THIS was not a particularly pleasant conclusion at which to arrive. Smith, as he waited upon him at breakfast, could not but observe the restlessness and the anxiety of his lodger.

“ I’m afraid you’re not very well, sir. You don’t seem to care for your omelette. Would you fancy anything else, sir? My wife would cook it in a few minutes.”

“ No, no, this will do very well. I’m sure it is very nice. I am a bit off my feed.”

“ And off your sleep, too, sir, I am afraid. I see your bed hasn’t been slept in.”

“ I fell asleep in that chair,” said Saltash, “and when I woke it did not seem worth while to go to bed.”

This was partly true.

Smith was about to leave the room when he remembered something.

“May I have your clothes to dry, sir?”

“What clothes?”

“What you wore last night when you went out, sir?”

Saltash looked up with a puzzled expression.

“When I went out?” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

A light dawned upon him.

“What made you think I went out?” he asked.

“Well, we saw the wet on the hall, sir,” said Smith, “and so I thought I’d better see about drying your clothes, sir. You mustn’t catch cold after having got so well here. It would undo all the good.”

“So it would,” said Saltash, “never mind the clothes. I’ll give them to you if I find they want drying.”

When Smith had left the room Saltash smiled to himself as he realised what he had done. By allowing his landlord to suppose

that it was he who had left the trail of drops from an umbrella in the passage he had assisted Mrs. Fleming in her scheme, whatever it might be. Already he had allowed his knowledge to compromise him. A letter lay beside his plate, and in his pre-occupation he had not observed it. He had indeed finished his breakfast and was rising from the table when his eye fell upon the envelope. The handwriting arrested his attention. The letter was from Mrs. Manton. The contents were nothing that is new to the reader, but to Saltash they were a revelation, and explained everything. He stood for a long time by the window looking out. He scarcely saw the objects upon which his eyes rested—the tiled path where the coffin had fallen, the white railing against which it had rested upright, the little gate, the hard bed in which nothing was growing, the road, the houses opposite. A man was loitering about and so absorbed was Saltash in his thoughts that it was only after looking at him for some

minutes that he saw him at all. Without being conscious of it he wondered vaguely his business. A pale sun was shining, and the white of the railings, the drab of the road, the indistinct yellow of the stucco opposite, combined in the wan light to compose a picture of neutral tints. Possibly the brown of the man's clothes was the only bit of assertive colour to be seen from the range of the window. Saltash carried back an impression of it when he went to the fire and sat down. It seemed to him that the further knowledge that Mrs. Manton's letter had imparted to him had doubled his difficulties. He could not mix himself up with a case of robbery, and yet he pitied Hanson from his heart. Mrs. Manton, in her letter, had laid great stress upon the coercion under which the girl had evidently acted, and Saltash, who also may possibly have been biassed, speedily adopted the same view. He would have liked to warn her that her connection with the case had been discovered.

He was interrupted in his meditation by Smith, who came in to take away his breakfast things.

“Mrs. Fleming doesn’t seem well, either, this morning, sir ; she hasn’t eaten a thing.”

Saltash looked up.

“Or else she’s had some upset. I never saw any one look so dreadful in my life. She’s just sitting in her chair looking at the fire, and she never spoke when I went in. I don’t know whether she’s read anything in the newspaper that’s been a blow to her—a death, or anything. I haven’t seen a paper this morning, so I don’t know whether any one has died of the name of Fleming. It might be something of that sort, or she may have had some money loss, a bank broken, or a fall in a stock she has invested in.”

It was evident that Smith hoped that Mr. Saltash would let him seek in his own paper for something that might explain Mrs. Fleming’s condition. Saltash, however, did not offer to do this and Smith had, as a

servant, been too well trained to express his wish openly.

The door had no sooner closed behind him than Saltash took up his *Standard*. But it was not the deaths that he scanned, nor the money market. He turned straight to a paragraph headed, The Robbery at Markham Abbey. He was able at once to account for what Smith had told him of Mrs. Fleming's state. The paragraph ran thus :—

“An important arrest in connection with this case was made yesterday in the person of a man who goes by the name of Benson. It is believed to have been he who passed himself off as the messenger from the Town Hall at Wilchester, and engaged, first the servant, and then Lady Markham, in conversation, while his accomplice entered the house and committed the robbery. The man was arrested at a certain library, under cover to which he had had his letters addressed to him. It is believed that from certain papers found in his possession, in addition to infor-

mation already in the hands of the police, it will only be a question of a few hours before the hiding-place of the other perpetrators of the crime is discovered. The authorities are sanguine as to the ultimate recovery of the jewels."

The click of the gate drew the eyes of Saltash to the window. A cab had drawn up outside and two men were coming up the path. One Saltash recognised as the man who had been loitering about outside all the morning. He was too much absorbed in his thoughts to pay much attention to anything else, and the sound of a peremptory ring and then of the door being opened, made small impression upon him. Even the noise of voices and of the passage to and fro of footsteps on the oilcloth did not arouse him. It was not till the stairs creaked loudly in protest to an unwonted weight that he realised that something unusual was going on in this house of strange experiences. He went to the door. He heard Mrs. Smith's voice in

loud protest and other voices—then a knocking and a cry.

He stood still as if petrified. He knew well what had happened. In a momentary hush in the babel of tongues he heard the voice of his landlord.

“It is absurd. I have no other lodger but Mr. Saltash.”

At the mention of his name Saltash roused himself and ascended to the floor above. A curious scene met his eye. The two men who had entered the house were standing in the middle of the room as if in possession. Smith, flushed and angry, but very calm was talking rapidly to one of them. Mrs. Smith was gesticulating violently and shouting at the other, and Mrs. Fleming stood leaning against a table, her head thrown back and a pale gleam of sunlight casting into relief the bold lines of her figure.

A dead silence ensued. Every one looked at Saltash. Then the man in the brown clothes spoke.



“This gentleman is not the man we want,” he said.

“I should think not indeed,” screamed Mrs. Smith and the uproar began anew. Across the room Mrs. Fleming met Saltash’s eyes in a long look. Each understood the other. He would have saved her if he could.

“Be quiet,” said one of the men suddenly to Mrs. Smith, “you make such a noise one can’t hear oneself speak.”

“Good job too,” said the landlady at the top of her voice.

Some one else came now upon the scene. It was Emma Hollis, who had at that moment arrived, and, hearing the noise, had come upstairs. She was standing open-mouthed at the door of the room. Mrs. Smith turned to her in excitement.

“Fancy, what these men dare to say!” she cried, “they dare to say as there’s some one hidden in the house.”

“What!”

“Dare to say as theres some one here in

the house been 'idden away. Did ever you hear the like ! It makes me that angry I can hardly speak."

"We shouldn't have guessed that," said one of the men quietly ; and then he looked at Emma, who had given a sudden cry.

"The man," she said, "the ghost, the man I seen—"

"Such rubbish," began Mrs. Smith, but the man in the brown clothes silenced her.

"Let this young lady speak," he said.

Miss Hollis looked from one to another. Smith did not move, her aunt was frowning, and Emma proudly felt every eye upon herself. Mrs. Fleming was looking at her inquiringly.

"Well, I saw a man come into the house one evening," said Miss Hollis, "and it wasn't uncle nor yet Mr. Saltash, and aunt and me thought it was a ghost, because a coffin was dropt on the path some years ago, and we made sure the corpse was walking."

"Oh, Emma!" said Mrs. Smith—"when we know as it was Mr. Saltash as you saw "

"It wasn't," said Miss Hollis. "He wasn't near so tall, and besides, I wasn't the only person who saw him."

"Who else?"

"Another young lady," said Miss Hollis. "It was Miss Brown as lives opposyte. She saw him at night."

The two men exchanged glances. Smith looked very uncomfortable and said nothing. Mrs. Fleming moved her position and the pale sun caught her hair, and it shone like spun gold.

"We'll have a look at the bedroom if you please," said the man in the brown coat. Saltash saw the drawn look that came over Mrs. Fleming's face. Her eyes closed for a moment. Her lips were parted, and he was sure that under their colouring they had grown white. A tremor passed over her from head to foot. He could see the yellow tendrils of her hair quiver in the light.

A move was made towards the bedroom.

“The door is locked,” said the man in the brown suit. “Have you the key, or shall we break it open?”

“Here is the key,” said Mrs. Fleming in a low voice.

She was standing close by Saltash. Criminal as he knew her to be he longed to say some word that might have comforted her. She read the pity in his face. She was trembling painfully now, and as she looked into the room her teeth began to chatter. She was breathing hard and her eyes were distended. Something of the anguish of nervousness that she was undergoing was communicated to Saltash. He had known from the moment of her delivering the key that it had meant to her that her game was up. He knew that a discovery was about to be made, and he felt his pulses throbbing with anxiety. Smith and the two men had entered the room. Mrs. Fleming leant for support against the wooden frame of the door.

Mrs. Smith, silent at last, looked at her furtively, and Emma, flushed with excitement, peered over the shoulders of her aunt.

Mrs. Fleming's hands were clenched in front of her. Saltash saw how the fingers were interlaced. Joan of Arc might have stood thus he thought, before her judges. Suddenly the hands were parted and one was drawn across her eyes, the other held the lintel as if to steady its owner.

The man in the brown suit was standing beside the grey trunk.

"We'll open this if you please," he said.

Saltash scarcely realised what was happening when through the room there ran the sharp report of a pistol and every one seemed to scream at once.

Mrs. Smith and Emma caught hold of each other convulsively. Smith had started back to the wall and no one in the room stood precisely in the same spot as before. Saltash looked at Mrs. Fleming. To his fancy she

seemed to have become supernaturally tall as she tottered forward and fell in a heap, with her arms and her head against the wood of the trunk.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A POSSIBLE ENDING?

EMMA, the type of beauty, was the proudest girl in Brinville. It is not given to every one to be present at a suicide, nor to have an uncle and an aunt whose house has been made the hiding-place of a great criminal. It was a thing to remember and talk of all your life !

“ And to think,” she said to Mrs. Smith, “ to think as it should all come out through those letters being found on the man as was arrested. I was sure she was directing them to the care of that Lib’ry for no good. It was just what Miss Hawkes done, and you know how that turned out with her. Uncle’s dreadfully upset, isn’t he ? ”

“ He can hardly bear to speak of it,” said

Mrs. Smith. "It seems he'd used to know her by sight when she was parlour-maid in Barn Street."

"She seemed such a lady, didn't she," said Emma.

"Ah," said her aunt, "that's just where you make the mistake. It was uncle as was took with her. I never thought her that, but I was glad of a winter let. I said her hair was dyed from the first."

"Yes, I remember that. I remember you saying as it wasn't golden like mine is. Fancy it having gone on all that while, and you never finding out. I suppose he used to sit still all day long in her bedroom, and, oh, aunt, fancy when you was turning out the room of a morning, as he should have been there all the time. How cramped he must have been in the trunk."

"Well I s'pose he was only in it for half an hour a day. All the rest of the time the door was locked. Oh, Emma, when I think as I nearly shook him one day!"



"No wonder she seemed to eat so much," said Miss Hollis.

"You're right," said her aunt.

"Think uncle Basset 'll put it in the guide-book?" suggested Emma. "It's quite a romance, isn't it? I shall never forget the way she fell down by the trunk, and I've only got to shut me eyes to see those men open the lid—he must have been brave to have shot himself like that rather than be taken. And he was very handsome, wasn't he, aunt?"

"Handsome is as handsome does," said Mrs. Smith; "I couldn't think a thief and a murderer, let alone a suicide, handsome, if it was ever so. I've been brought up different."

"She must have loved him," said Emma sentimentally, "or she wouldn't have helped him like she did. She was nearly wild, wasn't she, when she found as he was dead. Oh, I admire a love like that."

"Your head's full of them trashy novel-ettes," said Mrs. Smith. "I can't think however your mother can let you read 'em."

Emma pulled on her red silk gloves.

“Going?” asked her aunt.

“Must,” said Miss Hollis, “I’ve got to trim me hat for the inquest.”

At the door Emma passed her uncle. He had grown thin during the last few days, and his gait was listless and inert. He sat down by the fire and said nothing. Saltash had gone back to London, and was at that moment in Mrs. Manton’s drawing-room in Barn Street.

“Look at those flowers,” she said, pointing to a bunch of roses that had been put into a vase just as they came from the shop. “My idiot hasn’t even the gumption to untie the string. Do you remember how well Hanson used to arrange flowers? I want you to settle everything for me. I should like her to be well defended. Will you see about it for me? I don’t mind a little expense if she can be got off—or as nearly got off as possible. I can take up a little money—”

“I should think,” said Saltash, “that the

fact of the diamonds having been found in a box, sealed up and directed to Lady Markham, would be a point greatly in her favour. For myself, I believe implicitly that there is every truth in the conjecture that she was awaiting an opportunity to return them. And her letter shows to how great an extent she was acting under coercion—”

“Then there’s the fact of Hanson not having been the first girl whom that rogue Brinsby has got round.”

“And the sensational interest of her affection for him,” added Saltash.

“And there’s her beauty,” said Mrs. Manton, her lips puckering to their grim smile, “I should think there isn’t a jury in England who—”

She did not finish her sentence. It seemed unnecessary.

“It will be a pity to make her wash that lovely yellow out of her hair,” she said.

“I don’t know that it would be possible to begin with,” said Saltash laughing.

"I am afraid she will have to try," said Mrs. Manton, "I don't think it would be a respectable colour for a maid, would it?"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"You think of taking her back!"

"Look at those flowers," was Mrs. Manton's answer. "Did you ever see such a—such a lump? and my friends can drop me if they like."

But for the most part they would not drop her. Mrs. Manton had spoken with the conscious strength of an assured position. "The king can do no wrong," she said to herself, "and neither can I."

Saltash appeared a little doubtful.

"Look here," said Mrs. Manton suddenly, "I am an old woman, and a worldly old woman, more's the pity. I have heaps of acquaintances and perhaps not one friend—"

"Yes, you have," said Saltash quickly.

He put out his hand.

There was a tear on the withered cheek when Mrs. Manton spoke again.

“I think that girl was fond of me,” she said, “and I don’t believe the worst of her. I know that I was fond of her myself. I can’t expect to live for ever. I should like to have some one I care for to close my eyes when I die.”

Saltash was silent.

“Besides,” she added with a return to her old manner. “I’m a wilful old woman and I always do as I like.”

It was just before Saltash rose to go that the postman’s knock sounded, and a letter was brought up to Mrs. Manton.

“Just wait a minute,” she said with a chuckle, “Arabella is full of glee. ‘Isn’t it lucky,’ she writes, ‘that the diamonds have been found, for there is another fancy ball here on the tenth of next month, and I can go as the Ice Maiden!’”

THE END.









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